DWELLERS OF THE SILENCES

ALEXANDER SPRUNT Jr.

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DWELLERS OF THE SILENCES

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SLOWLY SWAYING FROM SIDE TO SIDE, HIS HEAD HELD LOW, AND HIS LITTLE RED EYES SEARCHING THE MUCK AT THE EDGE OF THE POOL, WAS AN OLD BLACK BEAR.

DWELLERS OF THE SILENCES

By ALEXANDER SPRUNT, Jr.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
CHARLES LIVINGSTON BULL

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TO MARGARET

EVER A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION;
A DEVOTED FIELD COMPANION
AND BULWARK OF ENCOURAGEMENT,
THIS BOOK IS
AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

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THE WHITE WANDERER

THE WHITE WANDERER

CYGNUS first saw the light of day on the shores of Southampton Island, away up in the cold waters of Hudson Bay. He had emerged from his creamy-white shell by repeated peckings at the edges of a crack in one side, and had finally sprawled out into a large, down-lined nest, where three other baby swans were entering upon the hazards of life. Standing over the nest, watching with devoted attention the struggles of the downy youngsters, stood the female swan, a magnificent bird, keen of eye, regal in bearing, her plumage a glistening, shining white. Nearby, her mate, an exact duplicate, was dabbling in the waters close to the shore.

It was a beautiful day, this July morning in the North Country. The sun shimmered on the far-reaching waters, as the little dancing wavelets caught the slanting rays. The sky was a dome of arching blue, and the breeze, sweeping from the great barrens to the westward, fanned the grasses on the shore into a softly whispering chorus. The home of the swans had been built on a little jutting point almost surrounded by water, and for long days the old birds had jealously guarded their treasures in the mound-like heap of down-lined grasses and moss. And now, though their cares were by no means ended, they were tinged with a new interest.

The little animated puff-balls in the nest, their bright brown eyes gazing about with interested wonder, were soon fluffed out to dryness, and a pleasing picture they presented. With their snowy bodies, pinkish bills and feet and sprightly airs, they were something to arouse admiration; but they also had wonderful appetites, which had to be satisfied by the redoubled attention of the parent birds.

It was not long before they were urged from the nest, and, waddling and tumbling the few feet to the water, the youngsters took to the surface for their first swim, floating as lightly as corks. Close at hand, and gigantic in comparison, the old birds dabbled about; immersing their long necks to gather from the shallow bottom such succulent morsels as might be found to feed the hungry little ones. During their first experiences in the water, Cygnus and his companions needed many rest periods, and, climbing to their parents' backs, would cruise about nestled deep in the feathers of their devoted carriers.

The little swans grew astonishingly fast. Steadily they put on weight, daily they stayed longer in the water, and soon began to forage about the shallow edges on their own account. Presently stubs of wings showed, and the down was replaced here and there by feathers. About this time the old swans led them farther out into the Bay, some distance from the shore. For their moulting time had come, and as long as the dropping of their wing

feathers made them unable to fly they were easy prey to any wandering hunter.

The time passed quickly. The youngsters put on suits of gray and white steadily, until, by early September they were fully clothed, and were splashing across the waters in long runs, flapping their untried wings and gaining strength each day. By the middle of the month they attained their first flights, and for some days cruised about the shores of the island and high above it, wheeling and circling in thorough enjoyment of their new-found powers. The cool, short days of September brought to the old birds a spirit of restlessness that the young swans shared, even though they did not understand it. For many days long files of ducks and geese had passed overhead, all headed toward the south. Cygnus had watched these swiftly voyaging flocks with a strange longing, an unaccountable, impelling urge. The geese, particularly, he admired. Their flight had a strong, appealing directness about it that fired the young swan's spirit, and their musical honking, floating down faintly from the aerial course, haunted him with returning echoes of its wild freedom.

Then, one afternoon, when the sky was thickly overcast and a cold wind roared down from the murky north, the old swans marshaled their brood, and pattering along the surface of the water, they rose against the wind, swung in a wide circle over the point of the island, and

straightened out toward the south. As they gained the upper levels of the aerial highway, a loud, clear, trumpeting chorus rang out from behind, and closing up with them came a long, wedge-shaped formation of snowy white and gray forms, driving in the same direction. Cygnus' parents increased their speed. Following suit, the young swans fell into line, and with strong beats of their now well-seasoned wings bored southward with the migrating flock.

All through the night the white wings swept onward, and as the day dawned, slanted downward toward a lake which shimmered dimly, far below. With many little splashes, the big birds came to rest upon the surface and immediately set about searching the shallow bottom and reedy edges of the lake for the tender shoots of water plants and other provender.

Cygnus swam about with joy in his heart. He had held his place in line with unwavering steadiness, glorying in the sweep and whistle of the wind about his speeding form. He now dabbled for his food with the same intent earnestness that had characterized his first long flight, and then, with the others put his head beneath his wing, and gained a well-earned rest. The birds spent some hours in feeding and resting, though the whole flock never did the same thing at once. While some slept, others fed and watched the surrounding country about them with keen alertness. In the early afternoon, the

leader raised his musical cry, and lifting his snowy wings, rose into the air, followed at once by a hurrying, splashing train of his fellows.

Up they went, in a confused, weaving mass until, when they were well under way, order was restored, and stretching out in front, the wedge took shape. One after another the birds fell into line and in a short time the formation was cleaving the sky in regular flight. Days passed thus, with the journey broken by alternate periods of feeding and resting.

The flock reached the Border, and passed over the Great Lakes, coming down along the gravelly bars, and keeping a sharp look-out at every stop. The old swans well knew the danger along these shores, the swift death that might leap upward from cunningly hidden blinds. Owing to the sagacity of their elders, the young birds learned to avoid the suspicious points, and learning, grew more confident. Leaving the Lake region, the flock bore eastward and came at length to the shore line of the Atlantic.

The weather became more and more threatening as they flew. The wind was gusty and variable, while the leaden hue of the sky promised snow and even worse weather to come. Late one afternoon, the elements arose in tempestuous fury, and the storm that had been gathering for a day or two broke upon them. Higher and higher rose the wind, howling and screeching behind them as if

a thousand devils were struggling in the clouds, which, ragged and torn, were whirled along in broken, misty folds. For some time the swans struggled to maintain the formation, but the increasing velocity of the wind made this harder and harder, until at last they broke asunder, and like so many wind-whipped clouds, were scattered far and wide.

Cygnus was frightened, but although bemused by the terrific buffeting of the storm, did not lose his head. He was tossed about like a cork and found difficulty in holding his direction. At length he tried only to maintain his balance and to keep in sight the bare half-dozen of his companions who remained within his line of vision. In this he was successful, and the little band, though widely scattered, was borne onward on the breast of the gale together.

As the darkness fell, even this grain of comfort was denied him. The blackness about him increased his fear, his trumpet call was not answered; or, if it was, no whisper returned to his straining ears. It required all his skill to keep aloft, and the stinging sleet that now whirled about him confused him and added to his terror.

Then, suddenly, through the flying murk about him, he saw a spot of palely glowing light. Far away it was, below him, and to the right of his course. Something urged him toward it—a prospect of relief from the overpowering darkness, or of some companionship; at any

rate, he swung heavily aside, pitched downward, and attempted to straighten out his course in its direction. Steadily it shone, with a luring, fixed intensity, acting on the storm-tossed bird like a great magnet. Onward he drove, the light ever growing brighter. Then, just as it seemed to flame into an all-enveloping radiance, a speeding black form drove under him with lightning quickness, straight into the glowing center of the fiery mystery.

Even above the roar of the wind he heard a heavy smashing impact. In an instant he had swung sharply aside and downward, almost colliding with a dark shape which hurtled down into the black void beneath with limply dangling neck and wind-whipped wings. In the brief glow he knew it for a goose, one of his clamorous companions of the northern lakes, whose southward-flying flocks had stirred the migrating urge within him.

He did not know, however, that this unfortunate voyager had saved him from instant death; he did not know that, in passing him when it did, the goose had crashed full against the high-reaching tower of a lighthouse, and that the diminishing glow that was swiftly dying in the receding distance was as deadly a menace as the innocent-looking clump of reeds that sheltered a crouching hunter. But he did know that he had been in imminent danger of something, and that the sudden snuffing-out of the speeding goose had warned him to swerve aside. His fright increased at the unknown mys-

tery, increased with each effort of his straining wings, but he labored bravely on.

All through the night he hurtled onward at varying levels until, in the early hours of the dawn, the fury of the storm began to lessen, and made his labors easier. As the light grew stronger he noted with keen pleasure, ahead and above him, four white forms, far apart, but recognizable as some of the scattered flock. High and clear rang his clarion note, and urging his tired muscles, he came up with and joined the others, making a loosely flying square.

The country over which Cygnus and his companions found themselves was utterly new and strange. They could see a widely curving river, on each side of which were vast areas of grass, cut into huge squares by intersecting canals and banks, the latter overgrown with a tangle of vines and bushes. Bordering these open spaces was a heavy forest of oak and pine, with here and there an open field, where small cabins stood. At intervals along the river bank, stately white houses reared themselves at the ends of moss-draped avenues of giant live-oaks.

Being worn and hungry, the four pilgrims slanted downward, intent upon rest and refreshment in the open stretches of water in the old ricefields. With Cygnus in the lead, they circled a small pond, scanning the ranks of sawgrass below with searching gaze. Keen as was this

scrutiny it failed to reveal a brown-clad figure, sheltered in a clump of canes at one side of the pond.

As the wide-winged wanderers passed over on set wings, with outstretched necks, a sudden spurt of flame leaped from the cane clump, a sharp, crashing report reverberated on the air, and Cygnus, an acute pain numbing his brain, crumpled loosely in his flight, his right wing dangling uselessly. Turning over and over, his good wing beating frantically, he pitched toward the water, a loud cry breaking from him. Another shot rang out. His companions towered overhead, and climbing steeply upward, faded into the mists beyond the river.

The speed of his descent carried Cygnus some distance beyond the fatal blind in the canes, and crashing into one of the canals he immediately made for the thick growth of sawgrass near at hand. The excited gunner, cursing his hurried aim, scrambled out of the blind into a duck-boat moored behind it, and poled as rapidly as possible toward the spot where the swan had fallen. After that one outcry as he was falling, Cygnus was silent. His weariness, coupled with the pain of his broken wing, had all but dazed him, and under the protecting canopy where he had pushed himself, he sat quietly.

The hunter meanwhile fruitlessly beat the grass not far away, in the hope of driving the bird into the open. Here, however, Cygnus was safe from pursuit, as it is almost impossible in the old ricefields to find any but a

dead bird. Realizing that he was baffled, the hunter at last ceased his efforts. Silence again descended over the scene, except for the whine and whistle of the diminishing wind, and weariness had its effect. Cygnus, despite his alarming condition, slept.

He awoke about midday, fiercely hungry. Venturing forth from his grassy retreat, he cruised about the canals, dabbling in the luxuriant plant growth and feasting upon the roots and stems of the aquatic vegetation. The broken wing, trailing as it did, worried him considerably, but did not interfere seriously with his locomotion. The water in the canals was not deep, and his long neck easily reached the soft bottom. Various sorts of marine insects, snails, and other succulent morsels were abundant. At last he stopped feeding, and began an investigation of his surroundings, taking particular note of the life of this strange locality.

Ducks of various kinds were common, and the sight of them was familiar enough, but certain other dwellers of these flooded fields were utter strangers to him. Dark, slaty-blue birds, with red frontlets on their foreheads, paddled and splashed among the reeds, breaking out occasionally into a chorus of clucking, grunting calls. Long-necked, long-legged birds, with slender bodies, waded in the pond edges, darting their spear-like beaks in the water, and catching the little fish that played about the shallows. Tiny brown birds, their tails cocked over their

backs at rakish angles, perched on the swaying grass stems, and poured forth a sweetly trilling song. Others, with olive-green backs and yellow breasts, peered at the white stranger through a black mask which seemed to cover their bright eyes.

It was all very strange and rather interesting, but as the afternoon waned, and the ducks began flying about, Cygnus heard at intervals, from different parts of the ricefield, that terrifying "boom-boom" which had rung in his ears as he plunged from the sky in the morning. The menacing sound filled him with fear, and he sought again the deep recesses of the sawgrass, remaining well hidden until nightfall.

The hours of darkness passed. From time to time there came to his ears the deep "whoo-whoo-aw" of a barred owl way back in the cypress swamp, and once or twice the guttural "quock" of a night heron floated down from the star-bespangled sky. He fed heartily in the dawn, and then swam about the canals and ponds in an aimless sort of way, looking for he knew not what, and conscious of a restless urge which would have caused him to seek the company of his fellows had he been able to use his wings. During his afternoon wandering about the ricefield, it was brought home to him that the dangers of this new country were not limited to human beings.

Swimming down one of the canals, he came to an abrupt turn in the lane of water, and rounding the corner,

where a thick clump of sawgrass grew rankly, he almost ran upon the butt of a semi-submerged log, protruding from the heavy growth. Crouching upon this log, busily engaged in devouring a black bass, was a long-bodied, blunt-muzzled, short-legged animal.

As the gray-white form of the swan rounded the corner, and loomed almost in his face, the otter, with a startled snarl, sprang to its feet. His temper, always short, flared into instant fury at this interruption of his repast, and without further ado he leaped silently, like a brown flash, for the throat of the equally surprised swan. Quick as was the attack, Cygnus was ready, and met it with his only defense. With a heavy, reversed surge of his paddle-like feet, he swept backward, and bent his head and neck sharply aside. The quick movement of his head had caused the otter to miss the sinuous white neck by a fraction, and falling into the water with a heavy splash immediately beside the startled bird, the lithe animal doubled like a flash, and threw himself across the swan's back.

His balance upset, Cygnus fell sideways, looping and twisting his neck, knowing instinctively that he must at all costs keep it from the otter's snapping jaws. With short, hurried grabs, punctuated by throaty growlings, the animal reached for the flashing neck, but missed each time by a hair's breadth. The water boiled and foamed as the contestants battled frantically, the little waves

HE LEAPED SILENTLY, LIKE A BROWN FLASH, FOR THE THROAT OF THE EQUALLY SURPRISED SWAN.

chasing themselves into the sawgrass, and making the tall reeds bend and sway in trembling confusion.

Gamely though Cygnus was fighting, however, the issue could not have remained long in doubt. The otter was as quick as a steel spring, and his method of attack was fast wearing down the swan's already depleted strength. And then, when this was just at the breaking point, a timely interruption occurred. Gathering all his strength, Cygnus had whirled in a short, rotary movement and raised himself suddenly by his good wing and broad feet. Though the effort caused him to fall heavily upon his side once more, it was effective in pitching his enemy from his back. The otter fell away, and Cygnus swam rapidly from him. But at once the animal whirled and returned to the attack.

Watching with staring eyes and despairing heart that quick approach, Cygnus became conscious of a sudden, violent boil in the water just behind the swimming otter. Then, from out of the commotion flashed a huge, ungainly nightmare of a head. Long jaws, from which gleamed yellowed tusks, opened wide. Cygnus caught sight of a long ridged and plated back, and the pallid gleam of a livid throat. With a lightning movement, the huge jaws boomed together. There was a strangled yelping scream from the doomed otter. A long, armored tail rose upward from the swirl of waters, and the old alligator turned downward with his prey.

Cygnus, trembling and amazed, backed into the protecting reeds with wonder in his heart. The huge saurian was as new to him as was the country of canals and sawgrass, and he could not know that, as a usual thing, all such fearful beasts were snugly ensconced in some hole in a bank at this time of year. He owed his life—though he did not know it—to a whim on the part of this old 'gator, who during the past few days had emerged from his snug retreat to roam the ricefields. But Cygnus did know that this new country, for all its peaceful appearance, was full of unseen and sudden danger. He remained motionless for an hour in the sawgrass, emerging then only when the pangs of hunger forced him to forage furtively for his supper.

There was an evil glow about the sunset that evening. All through the day the weather had been lowering and unsettled. Dark, hurrying clouds had swept low over field and river with now and then a dash of slanting rain. The wind, in short fitful gusts, blew first in one direction, then another, and, as darkness set in, held on in an increasing gale from the northwest.

Cygnus sought the shelter of the sawgrass, being but little inconvenienced by the storm. For hours the wind roared overhead, beating the tops of the bushes and canes on the ditch-banks almost flat, and bending the ranks of the stiff grasses in rustling, swaying confusion. It was just such a night as the swan had known not long

ago, but the fury of the wind passed more quickly. The dawn broke at last, gray and obscure. The ricefield presented a bedraggled appearance; débris and trash floated everywhere on the ponds, which were still whipped into little waves by the decreasing wind. Suddenly, borne on the wings of the morning, floating down faintly from the gray murk above, came a mellow musical trumpeting, a high-pitched, bugling note.

In his grassy retreat, Cygnus heard, and hearing, broke cover, emerged into the canal, trembling and eager, while he searched the heights above with longing, expectant eyes. Appearing far above, like drifting wraiths of the storm, came a V-shaped wedge of high-flying, snowy forms. A wild summons burst from the throat of the wounded swan below, as with straining eyes he saw his kinsmen passing onward, his cry unheeded. Brought down, no doubt, by the night storm, they were now keeping the higher levels, and as they faded from Cygnus' sight over the forest which bordered the ricefield, he paddled desperately after them, his long neck outstretched, his quavering call whipped away over the wind-tossed river behind.

On he paddled, an impelling force urging him onward toward the wooded border of the field. As he neared the woods he glanced behind and above him once more. Through the mists, in line with the vanished flock, three more white shapes were flashing far above.

Appealingly, longingly, he voiced his summons, but even as he gazed the ghostly trio disappeared. Pressing on, reckless, heartbroken and distracted, he gained the bank, scrambled ashore, and trailing his useless wing behind him, struggled through the growth of bushes and into the open, leaf-strewn ground beneath the pines. Coming to a little glade rimmed about with low-growing-scrub, he paused, his eyes straining through the high branches, and once more his clarion call rang clearly through the forest aisles.

Some hundreds of yards away, skirting the edges of a swamp, a hunting wildcat heard that strange, far-carrying note. He paused, listening again for that unfamiliar sound, his nose wrinkling as the wandering air currents passed, giving no clue to the source of the strange outcry. Then, his curiosity aroused, he sank to the ground, and with stealthy, crouching steps, moved silently toward the glade.

As softly as the settling of a falling leaf, but without a rustle, the gray form of the cat glided across the brown floor of the pineland and wormed its way through the fringe of scrub. His palely glowing eyes caught sight of the form of Cygnus as he stood, with head held high, oblivious of his surroundings. Sinking to his belly, the spotted cat stared at the big white form in amazed surprise, despite the fact that his hunting instincts and clamorous appetite were at fever pitch. He was familiar

enough with the big bronzed turkeys of the Low Country swamps, but this white stranger was something whose like he had never encountered in swamp or pineland. This curious big bird interested him, but, large or small, it was a bird, and birds were welcome at any time.

A distance of perhaps thirty feet separated watcher and watched, the swan's back being toward the crouching animal. No sooner had the situation impressed itself upon the cat's brain than he acted. A few, swift, crouching steps, a momentary pause behind a log, and then, his muscles bunched, the wildcat rose in a long, straight leap, a flash of grayish fur.

The descending doom struck Cygnus full upon the back. With a mighty convulsive effort, he heaved aside, endeavoring to throw the weight from him. His wing thrashed the ground in heavy strokes, scattering the pine needles in little whirling clouds. With a swift grab, the gray killer reached for the writhing, looping neck, his jaws closed, there was a heavy crunch, and the big gray-white form collapsed limply to the ground; the wide wing beat once, twice, then sank slowly downward.

Standing erect, the wildcat growled softly, a rumbling note of satisfaction, licked his jaws, reached downward, and grasping the base of the long neck, jerked the heavy body sideways over his back, and trotted off toward the dim recesses of the cypress swamp.

THE HUNTERS OF THE MOONLIGHT

THE HUNTERS OF THE MOONLIGHT*

It was very still in the ricefield. The sawgrass stood stiffly upright, only the flexible tops swaying slightly but giving forth no rustle. The brown water in the straight canals was like plate glass, reflecting the walls of green of either side like a fine mirror. Not even an insect hummed and the big bird, standing like a statue near one of the ditch banks, was as motionless as the water at its feet.

The fishing had been very poor that morning. Ardea had spent hours upon the half submerged log near the bank waiting developments. He had the characteristic which marks the true fisherman, unlimited patience, but results were so slow that even this quality was strained. Finally breaking his rigid immobility, he stalked along through the shallows, slipping his feet silently into the water and watching the surface keenly. Even this method proved fruitless and at last he raised his big wings and mounted into the air.

In long easy spirals he ascended above the ricefield and in so doing seemed to enter another world. He was absolutely alone now, no sound reached him except the hiss of air in his wide spread pinions as he banked in a huge circle above the field. The beauty of the Low Coun-

* First published in St. Nicholas Magazine. Used by courtesy of the St. Nicholas Publishing Company.

try beneath did not appeal to him, his stomach was complaining loudly and he was ready to go to considerable length to satisfy it. For half an hour nothing showed itself to the aerial huntsman then, far below, he caught sight of something which caused his yellow eyes to glow with interest. Another winged fisherman was patrolling the sky above the ricefield.

Ardea knew that the osprey was an expert angler and that results would probably be forthcoming shortly. He was right; he saw the big bird half close its wings, check its flight for a moment and, after a hurried hovering, plunge downward like a living spearhead toward the water. Far below a white splash leaped upward, there was a momentary struggle and the successful osprey rose on heavily flapping wings with a silvery shape clutched tightly in its talons. Ardea's hunger flared into sudden resolve; only waiting for the osprey to gain some hundred feet or so of altitude, he closed his wings too, and drawing his head well between his shoulders, dropped like a stone toward the unsuspecting bird under him. His velocity increased each moment, the wind rushing about him in a strident hissing as he plunged downward.

The osprey sensed nothing until a swift shadow fell across the water beneath it. In quick alarm it glanced upward just as a huge dark form seemed to envelop it, while a guttural squawk sounded in its very face. Big wings thrashed the air rocking the struggling bird vio-

lently in the swirling air currents, as though caught by invisible waves. In a panic, the osprey screamed shrilly and dodged aside but to no purpose for the buffeting wings were still about it and a javelin beak flashed dangerously near. In utter fright, the fish hawk opened wide its talons, dropped like a rock for twenty feet and swerved sharply aside as the silvery fish went twisting toward the water. Instantly the air quieted, the big wings had ceased their thrashing while the invader from the upper air dropped swiftly in the wake of the descending fish.

Checking his meteoric drop several feet above the sawgrass, Ardea reversed his wings and dropping lightly beside the spoil which had landed upon a matted mass of débris, snatched it up and swallowed it with keen relish. Ardea was a Great Blue Heron.

It was not often that the great bird, the "Poor-Jo" of the Low Country, attempted such high-handed tactics as that of relieving ospreys of their catch. Only when driven by a combination of circumstances did he indulge; and this morning he was not to be denied. He stood motionless for a few moments after swallowing the fish, his long neck held high, his keen eyes glancing out over the quiet scene in front of him, then, rising again into the air, he wheeled about and headed toward the distant cypress swamp.

With heavy flappings he alighted at the edge of a mis-

shapen mass of dead sticks high up in a blasted, sun-bleached cypress. Fanning vigorously for a moment, he slowly folded his wings and stared down into the shallow platform which served his family as a home. It was not a handsome home, indeed quite otherwise, for it was far from clean and an odor of stale fish clung about it. Neither were its occupants handsome, though they seemed not to be sensitive of their appearance or that of their home. Half naked, with tufts of feathers sprouting here and there on their skinny bodies, Ardea's youngsters gave little promise of becoming the handsome bird their father was. His arrival, and that of his mate who joined him almost as soon as he alighted, set the little herons into a fever of impatience. Craning necks and bulging eyes, together with half raised wings, made them seem many more than only four as they clamored for attention. Ardea's mate had evidently been more successful than he, for she stepped into the nest and proceeded to pump the contents of her stomach, a semi-digested mass of fish, into the nearest gaping mouth. The insistent clamor of the others reminded Ardea that this was no time for idleness and as soon as the female had finished her ministrations and left the nest, he followed her. There was work to do, for the family must be fed.

About a week after his robbery of the fish hawk, Ardea was engaged in one of his still hunts in the ricefield, thoroughly absorbed in his occupation. Perhaps two feet

of water stood at the end of the log on which he perched while the other end disappeared into the tall grasses on the bank. Near the unseen butt of the log was a thicket of smilax and cane, rising to a height of about four feet. It was a favorite stand of the old heron and justified his faith, for the fishing was good this afternoon and he was kept busy striking at the minnows which cruised within range of his unerring beak. Perhaps it was because of his absorption in his task that he failed to keep a watchful eye on his surroundings. Little did he realize, at any rate, that he had become the hunted instead of the hunter. Utterly unknown to him, a pair of eyes watched him keenly from the thicket on the bank.

Under the smilax tangle crouched a long-bodied, gray-furred animal with big round eyes fixed on the tall bird with gleaming intensity. For perhaps five minutes the wildcat had crouched there in the thicket, gauging the distance between him and the unsuspecting heron then, without a sound, moved over to the log and tested it carefully with an armored forepaw. Finding it solid, the cat crawled upon it, still sheltered by the grass and gathering its muscles tensely, crouched for a moment, rushed down the incline and launched into the air.

Its strategy was successful and its aim perfect. Fairly upon Ardea's back crashed the cat, upsetting him completely while both attacker and attacked fell with a mighty splash into the water. With a harsh squawk of

alarm and surprise, the heron lunged swiftly aside looping his long neck like a snake. This move saved his life at the very outset for it evaded the clutching grasp of the cat's jaws about that slender and vital portion of his body. Then pandemonium reigned. Amid a mighty splashing, the cat leaped off the heron's back, evidently disliking the water, and scrambled back to the log. Regaining its feet, it whirled about and made another determined leap at Ardea as the latter was struggling erect. This time the heron was ready and neatly side-stepped the cat's jump, leaving the latter to fall heavily, once more making the spray fly.

Here was Ardea's opportunity to fly, but his fighting spirit was thoroughly aroused and as the cat struggled back to the log the heron's beak flashed downward again and again, its dagger point piercing the furred raider at every jab, while red blotches marked the places of contact. Viciously and unrelentingly he struck, with unerring aim and telling effect. The cat, thoroughly maddened, again reached the log and hesitating not an instant, sprang swiftly upon its lanky antagonist. Breaking through Ardea's guard successfully, both animals went down now amid an astonishing medley of snarls, spits, growls and squawks. The conflict raged in the shallows while the old heron again saved himself by frantic loopings of his neck. The wildcat's hold was broken in the tumult and as the heron gained his feet before the

former reached the log, he got in some more punishing jabs about the wildcat's back. Scrambling ashore the animal presented a sorry sight, wet, bedraggled and bleeding, this young cat was fast learning things about herons which were new lessons to his inexperienced brain. But he had the tenacity to continue his search for knowledge.

With temper now beyond control and uttering a wild screech, he launched at Ardea's legs, bringing down the heron like a flash. The ensuing struggle with the cat now on top, then the heron, all but exhausted the latter; he got in one more jab as the cat broke away and then scrambled to his feet, panting and trembling. That the end was not far off was quite apparent, Ardea had done his best valiantly but he was tiring rapidly.

The termination of this novel conflict was as sudden and unexpected as the beginning. The cat, well aware of its adversary's increasing weakness, gathered wits and muscle for a last, determined assault. In their violent exertions the two had moved several yards down the bank from the log during the latter stages of the battle and were now opposite a slight rise of the bank, clothed atop with grasses. As the heron was struggling to his feet, the cat saw that he was directly under this slight eminence and swinging about, the animal made for the shore, disappeared momentarily behind a bush then came in sight on a crouching run across the grassy point, intending to leap therefrom to the bird below. As Ardea stared about

him, bewildered by the quick disappearance of the cat, a strange thing happened.

As there came a muffled clank, seemingly from above, he glanced upward to see the cat stumble in its stride and fall sideways, kicking convulsively as it screamed harshly. Ardea recoiled a step in amazement; here was something new and totally unexpected. The cat was indulging in a series of the weirdest contortions, snarling hideously, biting and slapping with one paw seemingly at the other. Ardea did not know that the animal had run squarely across a steel trap lying there in the grasses, but he saw in this interruption a chance to escape from his desperate situation. He waited no longer than it took to regain some degree of breath, then his big wings fanned outward, he climbed upward and wheeled across the bank staring down as he did so at a jerking, twisting shape below, whose movements were ever becoming weaker.

It had been a close thing for the old heron, as only his indomitable back and sturdy will had saved him, these and the hidden trap. Had it not been for the latter Ardea would at that moment have been but a mass of bloody feathers. On such strange events, such flashing changes, do the lives of the wild kindred turn. It was not long before Ardea's usual composure was as unruffled and placid as before but for the time being he was sorely shaken by his recent experience.

Ardea winged his way straight to the nest in the cy-

press, having no more appetite or inclination to work that afternoon. He rested quietly upon the dead limb which served him as a perch watching his mate pursue the task of providing for the youngsters. There was a brilliant moon that night and in the early hours he sailed down into the ricefield, fed heartily and returned to pump a goodly share into the throat of a little heron, and standing a few feet aside, watched the sun rise in golden splendor to light the fields in shimmering radiance.

Below him the dwellers of the reeds voiced their approval of the day. Blackbirds fluted silvery calls; yellowthroats clung to swaying stems and bubbled out a chorus of happy notes. A vireo chanted from a Cherokee rose vine while the steady trilling of pine and parula warblers echoed from the moss banners and a solitary crow flapped across the river, its somber plumage gleaming with metallic reflections in the early rays. From high above, in the upper air, came the thin, high-pitched scream of a hunting hawk. Ardea saw and heard, and the ricefield, as it awoke to its life about him, seemed a goodly place that day.

It was not long until the young herons began to show signs of restlessness in their rude home. They had increased astonishingly in size and were awkward and lumbering as they clambered about the branches with the aid of neck and feet, or stood solemnly in the shallow platform, ranged like graven images as they waited their

daily supply of food. The time had come, however, when they must begin to try their wings and those first flights were of consuming interest to them. Confidence came quickly once they trusted themselves to the nonsupporting element, and they seemed to delight in circling about the nest tree and sailing back and forth to the canals and fishing for themselves. The old herons gradually drifted apart then, and Ardea found much more time available for his own whims and fancies.

This utter freedom of the post-nesting season always returned to him with a pleasing sense of relaxation and relief. It was in this spirit that he journeyed late one afternoon much farther down the tidal river than his usual custom. There was nothing to limit his cruising now, it had been a full week since the little family had disintegrated and each taken its own way. The sun was sinking as he came to a wide creek which made back through the ricefields to a big swamp, dotted here and there with still lagoons. Ardea wheeled inward from the river and circling one of these quiet expanses in the flooded forest, dropped to the wooded border and stared about him expectantly. It was a beautiful place, the high trees draped with a profusion of gray moss streamers; the still wine-brown water faithfully reflecting every detail. For some while the old heron stood as motionless as a statue watching the life of the lagoon as it settled for the night.

A gallinule clacked drowsily from a clump of buttonwoods nearby, a peeping chorus of frogs rose and fell in waving cadence as dusk came on and once, a wide-winged egret, almost as big as Ardea himself, planed over the cypresses, its snow white pinions catching the last gleams of daylight in a rosy flush of pink. Silently the heron stood there until the deep-toned hooting of a barred owl, away back in the forest aisles, seemed to rouse him to activity.

Coming out of his statuesque pose, he lifted his feet and stalked slowly along the unfamiliar shore, his appetite keen and his eyes busy. Oblivious to the hoarse quocks of passing night herons and the insistent chanting of a chuck-wills-widow, Ardea found quickly that he had stumbled upon hunting grounds. His lethal beak darted again and again as he walked, transfixing minnows, frogs and other unwary victims as fast as they appeared. He had been pleasantly engaged for some time when a pale luminance above the trees gave promise of the coming moon, and shortly afterward it climbed above the tree line into a cloudless sky, bathing the lagoon in an elfin, silver light. Long black shadows reached across the water like questing fingers, black patterns etched upon shimmering stretches of liquid brilliance. The old heron ceased his walking as the moonlight grew and stepped upon an ancient log which projected from the trees well out into the still surface. With the coming of

the moon, the fishing grew better and better, for even as he stepped upon the log a fish darted out from under it and with a lightning jab of his beak, a slight splash leaped upward as the glittering shape came into the air. Swallowing his catch, Ardea settled on the log, drew his head between his shoulders and lapsed into immobility.

Perhaps it was that little splash, tiny as it was, which attracted the attention of a dweller in the lagoon. Perhaps that dweller had already seen the heron before the latter gained the log, but Ardea did not see those three dark knobs out there on the surface where they were as motionless as could be, and lay squarely in one of the long shadows which fell across the water. Cold, malignant eyes, their vertical pupils blazing with an unwavering intensity, glared upon the feathered fisherman and in their depths was a dull desire, a smouldering flicker of purpose which was unmistakable. The small brain behind those eyes, keen enough when planning attack, demanded action; but for fifteen minutes or more the huge alligator did not move.

Fifty yards separated bird and reptile. Nothing but smooth water lay between them and the old alligator deliberated between a direct frontal charge and a cautious circular stalk. Deciding at length upon the latter, those black knobs settled slowly, insensibly beneath the surface. Not a ripple marked their going, not a swirl told where that armored tail had swung the saurian

about and headed it toward the trees at a point some distance beyond the unsuspecting heron. Everything was quiet and Ardea still watched the water at his feet. Another quarter of an hour passed then, close under the trees, the three knobs rose once more, followed by the whole nightmarish head of the 'gator itself. In dead silence those cold, calculating eyes surveyed its intended prey; then with an infinitely easy motion they slid forward.

Under the still radiance of the moon the stalk that followed had something of the uncanny in it. Foot by foot that awful head with the green eyes came nearer. The long ridged tail moved with the complete silence of a shadow, not a ripple stirred the water or heralded the approach of the scaly doom. Once or twice during that inexorable advance, Ardea plunged his beak downward and each time a tiny splash leaped up and a fish was caught. He began to feel comfortably drowsy and satisfied; one more fish and he would be content to find his roost and sleep until the dawn streaked the Low Country sky. And all the while, slowly, steadily, the long black shape of the alligator neared the log.

Twenty yards from it, the monster came upon another log lying just under the surface. It stopped, the water was too shallow to permit climbing over without some sound; the hunter was still too far for a rush. With infinite stealth and consummate skill, the huge shape

backed slightly, circled the obstruction and came at last to the shoreward end of Ardea's stand. Sinking down, it lay for a moment, only the higher ridges of the plated back protruding from the water. Then it seemed to tense suddenly, the loosely swinging tail became rigid and quivered with suppressed energy. Slowly that mighty head came up, huge jaws dropped slightly open showing an array of yellow tusks gleaming against a livid throat. The moonbeams, glancing from the wetly glistening plates of hide, seemed to double the already enormous reptile in size. It appeared gigantic, uncouth, a grisly relic of an age long forgotten, a prehistoric monster of the past. Then it leaped forward.

Totally unaware of the impending doom, Ardea had just speared a frog which swam by the log and had raised his head high and stared out over the lagoon. What fancy sometimes stirs the brain of the wild creatures at crucial moments none can say. Perhaps they come at times of greatest stress, though the import of them may seem nothing more than a sudden impulse. Certain it was that Arda had no idea of the monster which was stealing upon him from the rear. Perhaps a vision of the old nest tree with his favorite perch flashed across his brain and impelled an answer. Perhaps some shady corner of the ricefield rushed all unheralded to him. All of it, whatever the impression or impulse, lasted but a second. No sooner had he swallowed the frog than, unhurriedly but strongly,

Ardea raised his wings and mounted upward just at the identical instant that the alligator charged.

The heavy swishing of his wings filled the air about the heron; and with never a backward glance as he cleared the line of trees in the full brilliance of the moon, the wide-winged Ardea disappeared beyond the cypresses, a blackly moving silhouette against the luminous sky.

Behind him, the water boiled whitely beside the ancient log. The infuriated alligator, balked in the very instant of its rush, lashed the quiet surface into snowy foam with flailing tail while clearly on the night air rose a hideous, booming bellow from its cavernous throat. The echo of it reverberated hollowly amid the flooded forest, rose and fell in wavering distant echoes, to float back again to the still lagoon where only a widening ring of ripples chased outward from the end of the old log to sink slowly into the placid water beneath the trees.

RED DAWN

RED DAWN

CORANE, the raven, sat upon an upthrusting pinnacle of rock, topping the summit of Grandfather Mountain, and watched the dawn. He was old, this Corane, old and wise with the wisdom of many years and the inherited learning of his forebears. Many dawns had he watched from his favorite pinnacle, and had grown to love and look forward to the birth of day with a strange yearning that increased with passing years.

But this day's dawn, which was breaking over the serried expanse of the Blue Ridge, seemed fraught with some strange, intangible foreboding, as if, in the ever-growing radiance, some evil portent were at work. For in all his long experience the old raven had never seen such a blood-red dawn.

Behind a bank of low-lying clouds that seemed to rest atop the distant crests, streamers of pale rose, like the questing fingers of a groping giant, flickered and waned. A shaft of yellow cleft the expanse and under the power of some mysterious alchemy changed slowly to a pulsing carmine. Then the ever-brightening area behind the clouds burst its darkling bands, throwing a shimmering sheen of red over the mists in the valley below.

Corane, watching the changing hues beneath him, was struck with wonder and vague dread. But when the flaming rim of the sun emerged from behind the ridges, the red sheen on the mists dissolved, even as did the vapor which supported it, and when the miracle of the sunrise was complete, his nameless fear had vanished. Standing erect, he glanced about him, then launched into the air and planed downward over the forest on the lower slopes.

Some distance below Corane's rocky outlook, and around a jutting shoulder of the mountain, stood an ancient, bleached and storm-scarred tamarack. Leaning slightly outward and towering starkly above the lesser growth about it, it seemed a grim skeleton of the past, a reminder of the ceaseless battle against wind and storm, its gaunt limbs writhing upward, and its smooth trunk, devoid of bark, gleaming whitely in the early rays of the sun.

Forbidding as was its appearance, and suggestive though it seemed of death and inactivity, it nevertheless afforded satisfaction to at least one dweller of the great mountain, for observation of its top would have revealed an occupant. At the very tip, clearly defined against the blue of the sky, sat another watcher of the sunrise—very still, but at the same time very much alive. Somewhat smaller than Corane, but of a trimmer,

CORANE, THE RAVEN, SAT UPON AN UPTHRUSTING PINNACLE OF ROCK . . . AND WATCHED THE DAWN.

more compact build, this other watcher had an air of haughty fearlessness that commanded instant admiration. This impression was due more to his eyes than to anything else.

Of a dark, expressive brown, they gleamed out from a jutting brow with such steady, far-searching intensity that the very spirit of the bird seemed to lie therein. Everything about him was handsome, trim, clean-cut. The top of the large head and all the upper parts were a dark, slate-blue color, and the creamy buff of the throat and breast was flecked and barred with blackish on the sides and lower breast. Just below the eyes and extending downwards on the sides of the neck ran a blackish streak, contrasting sharply with creamy throat below and slaty-blue above. The legs, and the large feet that gripped the tamarack, were brilliant yellow, and the keen-edged, curving talons were jet black.

Atop his lofty stand, Swift-wing, the duck hawk, looked, and was, a regal bird. Born of a fighting race, with generations of pure blood behind him, he was a ruler, and feared no living thing in all that wide-spread mountain country.

There were many, on the other hand, who feared him, and justly so. He levied heavy toll on the bird life of the mountain and valley, and his victims were legion. The falcons have always held high place among the birds of prey, and for dashing impetuosity of at-

tack, thrilling power of speed, and tenacity of purpose, no other hawk can compare with them. In the royal days of falcony in England none but nobility could own a Peregrine, and the duck hawk is the American counterpart of this noble bird, or, as it was called, the Noble Peregrine.

Between Swift-wing and Corane there had for years existed a sort of armed neutrality. Sharing the hunting of the slopes, they had much in common. Both were solitary, neither having a mate, and as the hunting was easy and abundant, each ignored the other with a kind of respectful indifference. Not that fear entered into their calculations for a moment. Certainly there was none of this feeling on the part of the falcon; he killed when he was hungry, sparing none. But the heavy, slow-flying raven simply did not interfere with him in any way, and was therefore disregarded. That there could be little doubt about the outcome of a sanguinary combat between the two was neither here nor there. Food was plentiful for the taking, and even a falcon does not pick a quarrel for the love of it.

Corane sensed the potential dangers of an encounter with the long-winged killer, and though they gave him little concern he attended strictly to his own business and let well enough alone. He was old, and getting older, the situation had remained unchanged for many years, and he was perfectly content to share the hunting

of the slopes and valleys with his smaller but powerful neighbor. More than once he had watched the falcon sight his prey, had viewed the magnificent stoop and the hurricane force of the attack, with a vague uneasiness that made him avoid the other bird for a day or two; but the feeling soon passed, and his usual indifference resumed sway.

Swift-wing, too, was watching the dawn that morning, but with none of Corane's feelings. He had seen the red sheen upon the mists, but to him it was color, nothing more. He sat for a long while, unmoving, on the tamarack. Far below him the black form of Corane moved slowly downward over the forest. He watched the raven idly for a few moments; then, realizing that he also should be up and doing, he glided suddenly from his perch and mounted upward.

Spiraling above the peak, his long, narrow wings urged him higher and higher into space. The vast panorama beneath seemed to sink slowly downward, although no detail escaped his razor sight. It seemed another world, this vast, silent void above the peaks, where not the slightest whisper of sound was audible except the hiss of air in his stiff wing-tips. The eternal stillness of the upper air was all about him. He liked it here, liked the press of the wind against his compact, hard-feathered body, the clear, cool feel of the wind, and the soundless solitude, of which he seemed a part.

Widening his aerial arc, he swung in a huge circle with the peak of Grandfather as a center, the whole of the vast, wild region outspread before him in every detail of its far-flung grandeur.

This morning patrol of the upper air was variable in length, sometimes lasting for hours. This time it was comparatively short. Out from the forest below, a flicker had left its task of boring into a hemlock bough, and with bounding, undulating flight started to cross the intervening space between the trees, along the eastern slope of Grandfather. No sooner had it come into view from the hemlock than Swift-wing caught sight of it.

His wonderful eyes glowed with an eager light, his slow spiraling ceased instantly, and, straightening his course, his wings drove him across the airy circle till it brought him over the traveling woodpecker. For a short distance, Swift-wing flew directly over him; then, speeding slightly in advance, he hardened his feathers, pressing them closely to his body, and, half-folding his wings, dropped forward, lowered his head, and began the stoop. The gap between the two birds lessened rapidly. The straight flight of the flicker and the slightly angled descent of the falcon, speeding now with terrific velocity, coincided like a flash of light.

Too late the whistling rush caused by the hurtling body of Swift-wing apprised the flicker of the descend-

ing doom. Even as with a terrified shriek it glanced upward, the sky was suddenly obscured by a feathered projectile whose armored feet outstretched before it smote into the flicker's vitals. The speed of the meteoric drop crushed out its life almost before the unfortunate bird was aware of danger, and with scarcely abated momentum, victor and victim neared the treetops. A score of feet above these the falcon's wings spread wide, and, shooting upward, he zoomed over the tallest hemlock with a safe margin. Turning toward the peak, he flapped thither, rounded the shoulder, and lit upon the dead tamarack, to partake at leisure of his hunting.

Corane, his hunger as yet unappeased, was foraging in the heavy timber along the banks of the brawling mountain stream that hurried down the valley. After his descent from the rocky pinnacle he had flown some distance down the valley and alighted in a tall dead tree, which had often served him as a convenient watch-tower. From its commanding height he now searched the ground below him.

A slight movement in the clear water at the edge of the stream soon caught his keen eye. Dropping swiftly to the shore, he thrust his beak into the shallows and drew out a wriggling crayfish. Dashing it sideways upon a rock, he stilled the squirming form and bolted

it forthwith. Some minutes of patient waiting brought another unwary victim too close to the edge, and it promptly met the same fate.

Corane might have made a meal upon the spot had he waited long enough, but his restless nature overcame patience, and he returned to the tree. For some time nothing showed itself. A woodpecker hammered noisily upon a chestnut limb nearby, invisible, but proclaiming its presence by its industry. A grosbeak whistled from the rhododendrons, and once the strident call of a jay rang out clearly across the rush of the tumbling waters.

And then, some distance across the foaming creek and above the trees, Corane saw doom overtake the flicker—saw it struck down in mid-air and carried toward the peak in the talons of Swift-wing. For an instant, his vague dread returned, and he was moved to try his hunting elsewhere.

Just as the old raven was about to spread his wings, a slight rustle and stir among the short grasses at the foot of the tree caught his notice. Freezing into immobility, he waited. The little stems trembled violently, then parted, and out into the open rolled a pair of gamboling chipmunks. The little striped rodents tussled and squirmed about in a compact ball of golden-brown fur, which occasionally broke apart, only to come together once more with a flourish of tails and excited chattering. The reckless revelers, always progressing

farther from the protecting thickets, were committing a fatal indiscretion.

Corane, watching every movement with intent, all-seeing eyes, was only waiting for the incautious pair to get nearer to the water. This was not the first time that he had been witness to a morning tussle between the little striped folk of the rocks, and he felt fairly certain of the outcome. At last, the two disappeared behind a half-buried stone not three feet from the water's edge. Quick as light, Corane acted. Dropping like a plummet to the ground, he alighted with half-open wings, and with two or three long hops gained a position immediately behind the rock. Hardly had he reached it when the brown furry ball bounced out almost at his feet. The heavy beak descended like a flash, once, twice, then came up redly dripping, only to fall once more. The ball slowly fell apart, the two halves quivered a moment, and then were still.

Quite methodically, Corane proceeded to make his meal. After devouring one on the spot, he wiped his beak upon a patch of grass, and, grasping the other firmly in his claws, rose into the air. Circling over the trees, he straightened out toward the Grandfather.

Some fifty feet below the top of the peak, and around a sharp angle of the jutting wall of cliff, was a narrow ledge behind which showed the dark opening of a tiny cave. Alighting on this ledge, Corane walked into the

crevice and deposited the body of the chipmunk upon the rocky floor. Then, reappearing on the ledge, he ruffled his feathers, perched upon the rim, and fell to dozing lightly in the sun.

This cave had been his home for years, and had served him well as a safe and sure retreat. Cave-dwellers naturally suggest hermits, and Corane was, through no particular choice of his own, a hermit. He was a representative of an all but vanished race in the Blue Ridge country. In his younger days, the ravens had been but few, and during his early life he rarely met any of his kindred. The brood of which he had been a member was perhaps the last one ever raised upon the cliffs of Grandfather. His parents had vanished long since, he knew not where, and the two other youngsters had met untimely ends, leaving Corane as the one surviving member of the family in all that vast Watauga region.

The fact that Corane still dwelt upon the great mountain was known only to a few of the mountaineers living in the nearby valley, and they had come to look upon the bird almost as a part of the scenery, and never molested him. He in turn troubled not the lambs of the mountain folk, and so lived in peace.

Solitude and the lack of kindred spirits had made their mark on Corane's being. An air of somber gloom seemed to hover always about him. Strong, wide of wing, tough

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of muscle, and in perfect condition, he was at the same time of morose and brooding temperament. He held aloof, suspicious of all, spending his days among the crags, or in the depths of the hemlocks on the lower ridges.

Of mankind he knew much, and his knowledge was born of sad experience. On his hunting trips about the valley long ago, he had twice been shot at by marauding youths anxious to display their skill with the rifle, and one had nearly ended his life. For days he had remained in his rocky retreat nursing his hurt, and the memory of it never left him.

Knowing nothing of the superstitious animosity with which the mountain folk regarded his sable kin, he realized, nevertheless, that mankind must be given a wide berth. That the ravens were hated, there was no doubt. Old tales, handed down from father to son, told of the dread consequences brought about by the black dwellers of the crags. Their harsh, croaking notes were taken to be omens of disaster, even of death. Their uncanny intelligence was attributed directly to the Evil One, and their depredations upon the lambs of the upland pastures brought down on their heads the wrath of the sheep-raisers.

What with the implicit belief in the old legends, and the active efforts made to rid the country of these emissaries of the lower regions, the end of the ravens was a

thing assured. Indeed, but for the presence of Corane upon the Grandfather, it was an accomplished fact.

The morning wore along, and the noon hour arrived. If there is a time of day when Nature seems to doze and inactivity holds the reins of rulership, it is in the late morning and early afternoon. To the drowsy Corane brooding on his rocky ledge, and the indolent Swiftwing in his lofty perch, the whole, vast amphitheater of wooded slopes below seemed lost in languorous torpidity.

On the higher portions of the mountain, where jumbled rocks were strewn and stunted bushes grew, the heat waves rose and shimmered in an airy, fantastic dance of light and shadow, as the nearly vertical rays poured downward unobstructed. The very breeze seemed to have lost its morning freshness, and died gradually to a mere whispering breath. It was still, very still indeed. A heavy, brooding silence lay like a blanket over the ancient peak, broken only by the sharp, metallic "chips" of the irrepressible little gray and white juncos, as they hopped about over the warm rocks and investigated the scanty vegetation in quest of insect life.

Down on a long ridge, thickly grown with a rank carpet of huckleberry bushes, a black bear squatted on his haunches and raked the laden bushes clear of their luscious fruit, lazily and methodically savoring their juicy

sweetness. From the cool, green depths of the forest below, the sweetly musical fluting of a wood-thrush floated softly upward, seeming only to intensify the intervening periods of silence, and, high over all the scene, swinging in magnificent circles, through the upper air, a golden eagle surveyed the quiet panorama with hard, unwinking eyes.

To Corane, this time of day was always welcome. It seemed to fit, in some way, his own brooding spirit; it was an aid to the dominant habit of dreamy retrospection that had been growing upon him of late. As he sat there on the ledge, lost in contemplation, his jet-black plumage reflecting the light in greenish, bronzy glints, he in turn seemed to fit exactly into the solitude about him. For centuries this quiet stillness had cast its soothing benediction over the upland country, centuries during which many Coranes had come and gone. It was the once powerful but now vanished Cherokees who had given to the raven folk the name that this lone survivor bore. Now, like the red hunters of the slopes, he too was going.

For a full hour the old raven kept his statuesque vigil on the ledge, and then, as the heat of the afternoon became stronger, and his appetite revived, he shook himself and, turning about, re-entered the cave and fell to upon the chipmunk.

Up on the tamarack tip, Swift-wing had made short work of the flicker. He was still hungry, and this golden-winged woodpecker, though a toothsome morsel, did not fully satisfy him. For some moments after he had cleansed his keen, notched beak upon the wood at his feet, he sat straight and alert, his eyes ranging ceaselessly over the trees below. Since nothing stirred there, he bethought himself of an upland pasture some distance down the valley where he had often found good hunting, and, spreading his wings, he sailed outward and downward, leveling off over the valley to the eastward.

Nearing the forest, he flew low over the trees, quartering the growth in unhurried flight; his senses on the alert, his eyes scanning the ground. Coming over a large natural clearing, he dipped downward, and skimmed over this space barely a dozen feet from the grass. Just as he gained the opposite side and was rising to clear the trees, a brown ball rose, rocket-like, from the ground beneath and slightly behind him. A muffled thunder of wings smote upon his ears, while a brownish streak flashed toward the trees as the ruffed grouse, startled almost out of its senses by the form of the falcon above him, leaped toward the protecting trees.

Swift-wing nearly executed a somersault in his frantic haste to check his flight and at the same time wheel after the fleeing grouse. His wings drove with straining

force to hurl him onward, but even as he gained momentum again he realized that it was too late. He was fully thirty feet behind when the brown bird dived headlong into a clump of rhododendrons, and vanished instantly from sight. Knowing that the grouse would use its feet to distinct advantage in the undergrowth, Swiftwing zoomed over the trees, and continued his flight in badly ruffled temper.

Grouse was always a favorite chase and royal game, and this lost opportunity fired the falcon's none too even disposition to quick anger. He was ready for trouble, and cared little in what shape he found it. Flying downward once more, he kept up his patrol until the trees fell away on all sides to reveal a wide pasture, grass-grown and dotted with clumps of laurel and other low vegetation.

No sooner had the duck hawk begun his aerial inspection of this space than he had the narrowest escape of his life. As he passed rather low over a clump of laurel, his quick eye caught a sudden movement in its depths, and like a flash he shot upward almost vertically, urging his muscles almost to the cracking point in his violent endeavor. At the same instant a tongue of flame leaped from the laurels and a spiteful, spanging report resounded on the still air. He felt a light blow on his left wing, faltered a moment, and, as the quick numbness passed, again shot skyward with strong, rapid thrusts,

until he became but a speck in the arching dome above.

The lanky mountaineer rose from the thicket, stared after him vengefully, and swore softly. "I'd 'a had ye, ye blame' rascal, ef hit hadn't 'a been fer thet bee," he muttered, rubbing his lean neck. So exact are the time-tables of fate: at the very instant that he was pressing the trigger of the rifle, an angry bee, brushed aside a moment since, had settled on his neck and sent home its tiny dagger. The hand that held the rifle steady as a rock had jerked involuntarily, and the bullet tore through the webbing of the falcon's primaries, momentarily disturbing his balance instead of smashing through his body.

After the shock had passed, Swift-wing boiled with rage. This incident, coming upon the heels of the grouse's escape, was enough to send his anger to the highest pitch. He knew the mountain folk, knew that their hand was against him, and that they were dangerous in the extreme; but it never occurred to him to be afraid. He avoided them, it is true, and picked no quarrel with any, but to turn tail and leave the pasture now was far from his mind. He swung about in short circles, almost out of sight from the ground, but with his fierce eyes following the man's every movement.

He saw the man walking slowly across the level expanse, saw him stop once or twice, and half raise the long black tube to his shoulder. Then, in front of the

striding form, he saw numerous brown specks leap from the grass, and scatter in every direction, to pitch again into the green carpet—all but one, and this one sped over to a large rock some hundred yards away from the man, and perched upon it. He saw the man sink to the ground, crawl swiftly to a bush nearby, then to another and another. Slowly the black rifle came to a line and held steady, a slight movement followed, and the brown bird on the rock collapsed limply to the ground. Folding his wings the falcon dropped earthward like a stone.

The mountaineer rose to his feet, chuckling at his marksmanship, and walked toward the fallen partridge. "Thet's what should 'a happened ter thet dern' hawk," he soliloquized. "He was shore lucky." He was barely ten feet from the dead bird when a whistling rush of air sounded in his very ears. With a startled exclamation he jumped backward, as a quick shadow touched the rock, and a feathered meteor fell—nay rather shot—downward from the sky. It seemed barely to touch the grass, but as it rose again with almost equal velocity, the partridge was in its grasp, as it disappeared like a rocket over the distant trees.

The man stared stupidly for a full minute, gazed vacantly at the bare ground by the rock, and then grinned. "Thet lets me out," he said. "I'm plumb beat!"

Back on the hemlock tip, Swift-wing, with exultation

in his heart, satisfied his hunger, again wiped his beak to cleanliness, and lapsed into well-earned repose. For some time, for two or three hours in fact, nothing showed itself about the peak of the Grandfather. Down in the forest below, however, the birds were caroling their afternoon chorus; insects hummed about the flowers in the clearings, and the wild kindred began their preparations for the close of day.

Corane, after his hours of dreamy repose, bethought himself of the rocky pinnacle above, from which he frequently watched the sunset as well as the dawn. There he remained for a while, standing just inside the entrance of the little cave and scanning the sinking sun with an intent, far-away look in his eyes.

Swift-wing, waking refreshed after his sleep, stretched himself lazily, spread one wing, then the other, ran his beak over his plumage for a few moments, and raising each foot, opened and closed the knife-edge talons. He must yet perform his sunset patrol of the mountain, so after these preliminaries he left his perch and mounted upward.

Up, up, above the heights he soared, the long, strong wings bearing him ever higher into the blue space in ever-widening spirals. Round and round he swung, his fiercely handsome head bent slightly downward as he banked the aerial turns, while his hard, brilliant eyes searched the depths beneath.

Hardly had he completed a dozen circles when an object caught his attention. He checked his flight, a sudden glow burned in the dark eyes, and his beak opened slightly. Then, dropping like a plummet for about a hundred feet, he swung about in a short curve, compressed his feathers, half-closed his wings, and drove downward like a living spearhead, the wind hissing stridently about his rushing form.

Two or three hundred feet below, flying parallel with the side of the cliff and not far distant from it, was the speeding form of a dove. After a repast of seeds and berries in a clearing at the head of the valley, it was headed for the forest on the lower slopes to roost. When it had traversed nearly a third of the distance along the cliff face toward the jutting angle where the wall bent sharply to the left, a swift shadow fell across the beetling wall above. In instant alarm, the dove glanced upward, and saw the descending falcon just as he began his stoop.

Stark terror claimed the smaller bird. Straining its splendid flight muscles, it leaped forward with doubled velocity; the wall at its left became a gray blur, while the wind generated by the awful speed whistled and tore about the rushing bird in a high-pitched, vibrating hum.

Swift-wing was immediately aware that he had been seen. Realizing that the increased speed of the dove would carry it beyond the point at which his stoop would

have terminated had his presence remained unknown, he leveled off the sharp steepness of his descent. Then, opening his wings, he drove with short, quick twists of the long pinions after the fleeing dove, the lust of the chase blazing in his contracted pupils, which held inexorably upon the darting form in front.

Lightning-like though the progress of the dove was the lithe hawk was ever growing closer. Up and down, like well-oiled pistons, the superb wings drove him onward, while the dove, with a terrified backward glance, saw the gap between itself and winged death growing steadily smaller. Urging its muscles almost to the breaking point, it flashed on. Could it but gain the angle of the cliff and make the turn, a long drop downward would give the laboring wings some slight respite before its final, heartbreaking dash for the trees.

The effort was successful. But—just as the point was gained and the dove whirled around the corner—Corane appeared from the crevice behind the ledge, and launched into the air. Instinctively he swerved sharply upward as the hurtling dove shot under him; then came abreast of the jutting wall and barely cleared it. The inevitable happened; happened like a flash of light. Around the corner, directly in front of the onrushing Swift-wing, loomed the big black form of the raven. With a desperate effort, the hawk attempted to swerve outward, but in vain. A wild scream echoed

weirdly among the cliffs and drifted thinly downward. Full into Corane's side crashed the falcon, his head lowered, his shoulders hunched.

A harsh, guttural cry was smothered in the raven's throat as the terrific velocity of the collision drove both bodies sharply upward. They hung, for a breath, tightly locked; then, with a strange deliberation, in marked contrast to the rocket-like ascent, slowly fell apart, and, turning end for end, plunged swiftly downward. After them, dipping, whirling, in easy looping spirals, came a single big, black feather.

Almost in the center of a little clearing, rimmed about by thickly growing rhododendrons, the two broken bodies came to earth. Two sullen thuds, one heavy, one lighter, broke the afternoon stillness. One dark blue shape, its head bent under the creamy breast, lay very still. About the crumpled form of the other, a crimson pool grew slowly outward, staining the rocks lying near, while a wide black wing rose slowly, quivered a moment, and then sank softly downward.

High above them, clearly defined against the evening sky, a single jutting pinnacle reared its rocky head, and the last rays of the setting sun shone upon its roughened surface in changing hues of red.

THE SOVEREIGN OF THE COAST

THE surface of the sea was almost motionless. Except for the slow, measured heave that bespoke the ever-present ground swell, the ocean was as nearly at rest as it ever is. There was but the merest breath of breeze, a fitful, passing stir of air that lacked the force to make even a ripple on the glassy expanse. Some distance above the horizon now, the newly-risen sun, glowing like a ball of molten gold in a setting of purest cobalt, poured its fervent heat downward in unobstructed, slanting beams.

A gleaming patch of white showed the presence of a becalmed schooner, her wide spread of canvas as motionless as that of a pictured ship; while far away another glint of white topped by a band of green denoted one of the low-lying barrier islands of the Low Country coast. Suddenly a school of flying fish broke the surface, to rise, skim away on glittering wings, and, describing a wide curve, drop back into the still water, leaving an ever-spreading ring of dancing ripples that soon lost themselves and disappeared into the infinity of the sea. Silence reigned.

Just under the surface, basking in the warmth of the sun that penetrated the thin layer of water, lay a large

catfish. It too, was motionless, except for an almost imperceptible waving of its fins. And this catfish, unaware, was being watched from above and below. The two watchers, as different in habit, appearance, and mode of life as the two poles, eyed the fish with identical motives: both wanted what they saw, and both were preparing to get it. Because he knew what the other would do, the watcher above bided his time, and waited. The watcher below, neither knowing nor caring about the one above, acted almost as soon as he saw the catfish.

There was a sudden, violent disturbance of the still surface. A foaming, boiling surge appeared like magic; there was a long, silver gleam, a dash of slaty-gray, a rolling flick of a sharp, triangular fin, a flash of tooth-studded jaws. Then, in the patch of agitated foam, sheared cleanly in half behind the dorsal fin, appeared the forepart of the body of the catfish, while the big shark, content with the remainder, turned slowly toward the depths. Before the tossing patch of water had sunk to calmness, a rush of air whistled from above, and a dark body shot like a meteor from the sky. The foam leaped high in a mighty splash, and rising slowly, with labored wing-beats, a huge bald eagle slanted upward, with the forepart of the catfish clutched firmly in his keen-edged talons.

Winging his way toward the barrier island, the big bird came at last to the beach, and lit heavily on a dead

pine-tree that rose starkly above the lower vegetation of tangled oak, cassina, and palmetto. Here he fell to upon the catfish, and partly satisfied his royal appetite.

As he sat upon his lofty perch, preening his plumage after his meal, this old eagle looked to be what he was: a king. For years his rule of the salt marshes, barrier islands, and bordering sea had been undisputed and complete. If he was something of a despot it was because he had never met opposition. None of the avian dwellers of beach and marsh approached him in size or prowess, unless the wide-winged ibises that fed occasionally on the mud flats could be counted, and their mild, inoffensive dispositions made them equally his subjects. Large they certainly were, but like the slow-flying great blue herons they could never be rivals for rulership.

He had been hatched and reared on this very island, and had followed his parents as its ruler. There had been a time, too, when he shared this rule with a worthy mate, until a rifle in the hands of a negro fisherman from the mainland had ended her life, since when he had lived in solitary aloofness. Other eagles had made their appearance from time to time along the beaches, but their presence had never been tolerated, and each had been made to know that this king of the coast would brook no sharing of authority.

As befitted his position, he had chosen wisely in his throne. Ugly the old pine may have been, stark and

bleached-looking, but it served none the less admirably its purpose as a commanding look-out and resting place. Here the king was wont to sit, sometimes for hours on end, gazing seaward, skyward or landward, an impressive, regal figure. It was his invariable practice, after the first catch of the morning, to pay considerable attention to preening, and his plumage ever bore witness to this care. If its range of colors was rather limited, they were none the less striking in their contrasts.

Head, neck and tail were of a gleaming, snowy whiteness, with a faint tinge of yellow showing about the crown and behind the eyes. Everywhere else the feathers were of a lustrous, deep dark brown, appearing from a distance almost black. His large, hooked beak was yellow, as were his strong and formidable feet tipped by curving black talons. His eyes were wonderful. Of a hard, brilliant yellow, they were set under the beetling white brows with such an expression of cool assurance and dominating power that they radiated the latent force and virility of the kingly bird himself.

Calm, cold and haughty he sat, after his toilet was complete, seeming to typify the majestic spirit of the sea beneath him, and the inscrutable, pulsing life of the almost tropical jungle that surrounded the base of his throne. Though his morning meal had been a light one, he seemed disinclined to increase it. As his custom was, he had left his look-out some time before sunrise, and

had mounted upward and outward over the sea, where, appearing like only a speck from below, he had swung in magnificent circles in his early morning patrol. His marvelous vision had picked out every detail of the quiet scene below, the glassy surface of the sea, the becalmed schooner, and the low-lying coast of the island.

It was well after sunrise that he had seen the catfish appear near the surface. As catfish were very desirable, he had ceased his swinging flight and hovered far above. Then the long, trim body of the shark took shape beneath the basking fish. He knew at once that the gray killer in the depths would act quickly, and he knew also that there would be enough left of the catfish to serve him for a meal. Sharks always cut their catfish prey in half, behind the hard, serrated dorsal fin, leaving the forward portion to be cast up on the beaches by the tides, and it was ashore that the old eagle usually found such meals. But he was hungry now, and only waited for the inevitable outcome of the swirling attack, and the descent of the shark to the ocean depths, before he closed his wings, lowered his head, and plunged downward like a feathered arrow from the heights.

Just as he reached the sea, his feet shot forward and his wings opened. As the waters splashed high about his compact body, he grasped the catfish firmly and began the upward slant toward the dead pine, upon which he now sat, morning meal and toilet finished. For per-

haps an hour he stared unwinkingly out over the tranquil sea. The breeze had picked up about ten o'clock, as it usually does along the coast in summer, and now rippled the surface into a thousand dancing wavelets, while the incoming tide rolled onward to the beach in a soft, hollow thunder of breaking surf.

It was toward the end of summer, but the day was almost torrid in its temperature. The white glare on the sand near high-water mark was all but insupportable to the eye; the heat waves shimmered upward in a grotesque dance of quivering rays as the beach steamed and baked under the late September sun. Though he minded the heat little if at all, the old eagle at last turned to action, and spreading his enormous wings sailed outward from the pine and spiraled slowly upward.

In steadily widening circles he flew, higher and higher. At a thousand feet or so, he came into a current of steadily rushing air, a silent river in the waste of space. Evenly, noiselessly, this aerial stream coursed about his body, only a rustling whisper breaking the eternal quiet of the upper air, his stiff wing-tips smiting the wind at a sharp angle as he tilted in his swing.

Like some vast map, sea and land lay spread beneath. Beach and off-shore bar, woods, marshes, and winding creeks lay etched in living color in the wide scope of his vision, and not a detail escaped his piercing scrutiny. Busy skimmers plying their fishing about an outlying

sand-bar; wandering terns flashing whitely in the sun as they dived; heavily flapping pelicans cruising the coast-line—all were noted, and dismissed as everyday sights from the vastness of the sky.

In the steaming greenery of the cassina thickets on the island, big, gray wood-rats foraged in the undergrowth, making short dashes across the open glades, or climbing about their bulky nests in the palmetto branches. Once a deer stepped daintily along a hog path, and paused at a marshy slough to wallow in the shallows, ridding itself of flies and swarming insects; while along the back beach, in busy but deliberate manner, an old raccoon poked his wrinkled visage into marshy nooks and about the muddy oyster beds.

Straightening his circular swinging after a while, old Wide-wing, the eagle, crossed the island, and began a patrol of the vast stretches of salt marsh that lay between it and the distant mainland. This huge green area, intersected by creeks and estuaries, was a fruitful hunting ground, and seldom failed to yield some results of a careful watch. So deserting the sea, the old eagle swung about over the marshes, and bent his snowy head downward with a keen, all-seeing, brilliant gaze. His diligence was soon rewarded.

A sudden heavy ripple in one of the wide marshy creeks caught his eye. Slanting downward, he soared some hundred feet or so above, and continued his search-

ing stare. Traveling swiftly up the creek in crowded, hurrying ranks was a large school of mullet. Near the surface they swam, sometimes actually breaking it in scintillating, silvery gleams as the sun caught the glittering scales. There was reason for their haste, for, close behind them, a rolling wave of green water flecked with foam gave proof of the presence of a pair of torpedo-like bodies arching gracefully through the water in easy, effortless speed. Two or three quick spurts, and the porpoises were among the crowded mullet.

Right and left they struck, the frightened fish darting in wild confusion about them, as with snapping jaws and flailing tails the porpoises spread destruction. Such a scene of watery carnage was not new to Wide-wing, and he gazed with eager, expectant eyes toward the mud flats that lined the edges of the creek. In a few moments, the advancing wave that continually topped the scene of the mullet slaughter spread all the way across the creek and washed high up over the black-brown mud flats, only to recede swiftly as the chase moved steadily up stream. It brought just what Wide-wing was awaiting. Thrown up by the wash, and left struggling impotently, were a full half-dozen of the big silver fish.

Swooping lightly downward, Wide-wing planed toward the bank, lit beside the biggest fish, and stooped quickly. His beak struck each fish in turn a heavy blow upon the head, which speedily stilled the squirming

forms. The old eagle at once began his meal. Grasping a fish in his claws, with two or three awkward hops he gained an old log half buried in the mud, and holding down his slippery prey with one foot, tore off mouthfuls of the soft, white meat and swallowed them hurriedly, as if the abundance of food at hand needed quick attention.

After his repast of mullet, Wide-wing returned to his look-out tree and composed himself to rest in earnest. With his snowy head hunched between his shoulders, he sat unmoving, grasping the bleached limb of the pine with one foot, while the other was drawn well up amid the feathers of his body. Except for an occasional movement of his wind-stirred plumage, he might have been an avian statue, so rock-like in its stillness was his pose. Closing his eyes, he dozed lightly in the fervent heat of mid-day.

Below him, on the beach and in the thickets, the life of the barrier island seemed lulled to rest as the late summer heat enveloped the region. The gray wood-rats were dozing in their nests; the slim-legged deer lay in the deep shade of the live-oaks, and the quizzical-faced raccoons found convenient crotches in which to curl their bushy, ringed tails about their heads and while away the mid-day tedium. The lazy hum of insects arose in a droning murmur above the steaming jungle and blended softly with the monotone of the breaking surf.

It was only upon the beach that any activity was noticeable. Here, in spite of the lack of shady vegetation, it was somewhat cooler, for the sea breeze swept across the sands with refreshing vigor. Dainty little plover darted about guiding their now well-grown youngsters in a search for food. Clamorous willets passed along on flashing black and white wings, their strident calls echoing shrilly over the sandy stretches. A pair of handsome oyster-catchers, their stout, red bills gleaming vividly in the sun, stood upon a little sand-bar reaching out into the tide, while a flock of diminutive sandpipers probed the damp sand with long, spear-like bills.

Some distance down the beach, about a mile from Wide-wing's look-out tree, dwelt some neighbors of his who ranked next in size to his royal self. Only in size, however, did they approach him, for, like the other denizens of the beach, they were in complete subjection to his will. Their home was in a wide-branching pine on the edge of the jungle—a huge, lumpy nest of sticks, clods, and other débris which, added to year by year, had assumed enormous proportions. These neighbors were a pair of ospreys, for years residents of the island.

Though often imposed upon by their white-headed sovereign, they seemed to accept the situation as a matter of course, and their almost daily tribute of hard-earned spoils was rendered to him constantly if grudgingly. Their two eggs had hatched long since, and the

youngsters had for some time been engaged in learning how to fish and in taking daily exercise in flights about the islands and adjacent marshes. Just now, as one of the old ospreys took off from the nest tree with one of the young in attendance, and sailed off over the ocean for a fishing trip, Wide-wing awoke from his afternoon siesta and, seeing what was going on, also left his perch, and mounted toward the sky.

The two ospreys meanwhile were quartering back and forth over the rippling surface of the sea, watching with keen eyes for some unwary dweller of the deep to approach close to the top of the water. Once or twice the older osprey hovered on heavily flapping wings, perfectly stationary, and looking like a giant kingfisher as he searched the waters critically; but each time he sailed onward without an attempt at plunging. At last the opportune moment arrived, when, with hardly a moment of preparation, the big bird folded his wings and slid downward with whistling velocity. It was an inspiring, thrilling descent. As the heavy splash resounded and the wide wings again caught the air, a gleaming, silvery shape was borne aloft, clutched firmly in the curving talons.

With a violent shake, the osprey shook the clinging drops from his plumage in a glittering shower, and with a quick movement shifted his grip upon the fish so as to bring it head on into the wind, and parallel with his

own line of flight, so lessening the resistance of the air against it. Accompanied by the eager youngster, he winged onward toward the nest in the pine, where, perched on the rim, his mate and the other youngster awaited him.

Halfway toward it, a sudden, tremendous blast of rushing air smote upon his ears, and a huge, dark body shot by him within a few inches of his head, turning like a flash to flick a stiff wing-tip in his very face. With a startled scream the osprey side-slipped sharply to the right and whirled backward. But instantly the pursuing terror was upon him, buffeting him with huge wings, while a high-pitched, yelping scream echoed above the strident whistling of the beaten air currents. It was too much for the osprey. Knowing the only procedure that would relieve him of the tormenting fury above, he loosened his hold upon the fish, and with a baffled cry, turned outward at a sharp angle.

At once there was quietness about him, as in a long, swinging curve, Wide-wing shot downward with wonderful speed and snatched the falling fish only ten feet above the water. He turned steeply upward, the wind humming through his distended wing-tips, and, gaining altitude, swung quickly toward the beach. The brow-beaten osprey, having once more paid his tribute to the royal ruler of the island, but taking the appropriation as a matter of course, immediately began a

philosophical search above the creek behind the beach.

Wide-wing, alighting once more upon his look-out, made a good meal of the big trout, and gave the matter no further thought. His theft was one of the royal prerogatives that he exercised without mercy or compunction. He was perfectly capable of catching fish for himself, with as much despatch and skill as the osprey, but, like many who rule, he saw no reason for making the extra exertion when the task could be performed by another for his special benefit. And the big fish-hawk, like others who submit because they must, did it with as much grace as possible. Even as Wide-wing was finishing the trout, the osprey had caught another in the creek behind the island, and, unmolested, carried it to the nest to be devoured at leisure.

The warm days of lingering summer passed at last, and with the first tang of autumn in the air the life of the barrier island changed. The skimmers and the pelicans gathered in flocks and departed for warmer climes; the little plovers winged away into the southern distance, and their places were filled by migrating bands of sandpipers and curlews from the north. The brilliant little nonpareils of the cassina thickets left their leafy coverts and voyaged southward with squadrons of warblers and swallows; while the osprey family left the old nest in the pine, and drifted down the coast in easy, leisurely travel.

But the fox squirrels in the jungle, the raccoons along the marshes, and the swamp rabbits in the grass had no thought of leaving, and their only preparation for the winter was to replace their threadbare fur by a coat of thick, soft texture, which had now assumed a glossy smoothness. The velvet of the antlers on the proud bucks had long since rubbed off, and the falling leaves made more conspicuous the lurking places of bright red cardinals and somber-colored mockingbirds.

Wide-wing gave the seasons but little thought. The winter was, of course, somewhat more strenuous than the lazy summer time, for he was then forced to do much of his hunting himself, his fish-hawk subjects being far to the southward. The cool, snappy days, however, had their effect upon his spirits, and he hunted in the winter with a dash and vigor that bespoke a yet unimpaired vitality despite advancing years. October passed without untoward incident, and November came with clear cold days that held a promise of an early and unusual winter.

On the island, the winter residents had taken up their abode, and many of the northern birds were much in evidence. On the whole, the general aspect of the vegetation had changed but little. In the mild climate of the southern coast, much of the growth was evergreen. The oaks, cassina, and palmettos, with here and there a stately holly-tree, gave a distinct tinge of green, and the

jungle still presented an impenetrable leafiness. On the dunes, however, the sea-oats became bleached and withered-looking; the marshes assumed their drab-brown hue, and keen winds swept the beaches cuttingly. In the thick coverts, flocks of white-throated sparrows scratched among the leaves; and towhees and thrashers foraged like miniature chickens amid the undergrowth.

Out in the creeks and estuaries, grebes and mergansers dived and splashed, while the winter population of ducks began to arrive in large numbers. It was among the waterfowl that Wide-wing found his best winter hunting, and he watched their coming with satisfaction. As the days passed, their numbers, instead of reaching a peak and there remaining stationary, kept ever growing. Though not understanding the portent, the old eagle was somewhat impressed by the unusual abundance. Flocks of scaups rafted in huge black blankets well offshore; big black surf ducks bobbed about among the waves, while loons and mergansers cruised the waters beyond the sandy reef and behind the island. Black ducks and golden-eye sported in the tidal river, and sprightly little black and white buffleheads carried on their extensive diving operations about the oyster banks. Wide-wing could not know that the Winter King was wrapping the north in icy folds, and that these wildfowl armies were being forced to seek milder climes.

One afternoon when he was wheeling high above the

marshes he saw the first flock of geese. He was thrilled at the sight of the heavy-bodied birds, because glimpses of them were very rare, and not often granted to any dweller of the Low Country. As a usual thing they remained north of his domain, and he had seen them only once or twice in his entire life. It was a sharp, cold afternoon, and the wind was whistling shrilly about his swinging form, when far below him he saw the long, V-shaped formation of the driving voyagers. He was soaring very high, only visible as a speck from the ground, and the geese themselves were at no mean height.

As he caught sight of the noble game, and their faint, thin honking came faintly upward through the space about him, his hard yellow eyes glowed with a strange, eager light. Here was quarry worthy of his royal attention indeed, and his muscles tensed as he ceased his lazy swinging for a series of short, quick arcs, and gauged the speed of the swiftly voyaging flock below. In a few minutes they were almost directly under him, and with quick powerful thrusts of his ample wings, he flew along parallel with their course, easily keeping pace.

Gradually, almost imperceptibly, his speed increased. He drew slightly ahead, and with one more searching look he dropped his snowy head, hardened his plumage, and, drawing his feet well up into his body feathers,

threw himself forward at an angle, all but closed his mighty wings, and pitched downward in a long, magnificent stoop.

The unsuspecting geese continued their straight, undeviating course, while a soft occasional "honk" drifted backward on the wind as the leading gander voiced some flight command. On they sped, while with incredible quickness the angle of their flight line and of Wide-wing's descent was closing toward the fatal point. The eagle's speed was now terrific in pitch and force. Even above the rush of air about the flock, the whistling song of the wind about his hurtling form at last beat in upon the ears of the old gander at the apex of the V. With a startled glance upward, he voiced a hoarse, half-choked warning, but, even as it struggled from his throat, with a sickening impact the eagle crashed among them.

In wild, disordered confusion the flock scattered far and wide, dropping downward, whirling aside, and zooming upward like a disintegrating feathered bomb, while, fairly upon the back of the goose that had been third in line of the right-hand leg of the formation, came the crushing impact. Two heavy, yellow, knob-like feet, their curving talons gleaming blackly, drove like a pile-driver into the unfortunate bird's vitals, and, its squawk of terror smothered in its throat, it shot downward toward the sea with the heavy body of the

eagle glued to its back. Suddenly the broad wings above it opened wide, and catching the air under them, bore victor and victim off on a long curve toward the beach. Meanwhile the frightened leader had gathered the survivors into some semblance of order and, marshaled into a rough formation, they disappeared like gray shadows into the murk to the southward.

Wide-wing had undertaken about all that he could manage. With the dead weight of the goose in his talons and the dangling wings and neck presenting some considerable resistance to the wind, he headed toward the beach with heavy, labored wing-beats. Tacking into the wind at an angle, the eagle bored his way shoreward, finally coming to the beach some distance from the pine-tree throne. But he had no idea of carrying his prey thither. Though he had arrested his meteoric descent with the quarry some hundred feet or so above the sea, by the time he reached the beach he was barely clearing the surf, and came to rest upon the sands just at high-water mark. Here he stood motionless for some time beside the body of his victim, regaining his wind.

This accomplished, he made his royal meal and, leaving what remained of the body upon the spot, he rose into the air and made his way to the dead pine to sit unmoving in the growing darkness, staring out over the incoming tide with unwinking, steady gaze.

The next morning dawned gray and colder. An omi-

nous, impenetrable haze hung over the seaward horizon and the wind was strong, gusty, and biting in its sweeping intensity. For some while Wide-wing sat upon the pine, his plumage so ruffled that he appeared twice his normal size. As his appetite grew more insistent, he sailed at length down over the sand and, alighting by the body of the goose, fed to the limit of his capacity; then returned once more to his look-out. As the day wore on he remained inactive, standing on the branch and bracing his body against the increasing wintry blast which smote him heavily with its frigid breath. In the early afternoon he mounted upward, however, and began his belated patrol.

For some time nothing showed itself to the royal huntsman. That is, nothing that he chose to honor as his prey. Some distance from the beach, a small flock of surf ducks sported among the waves, heeding not the tumbling waters but enjoying their carefree existence as though the troubled breakers were but a mill pond. Wide-wing saw them, but dismissed them in the same breath. Then, too, the water did not permit of fishing, being far too rough, so he based his hopes upon surprising some unwary traveler of the air. Some considerable patient circling at last brought results.

He was swinging about at rather a lower elevation than usual because of the cloudy, misty condition of the sky. Had he been much higher all sight of the sea would

have been obscured, for the swiftly hurrying clouds were reeling in close-packed ranks just above him. Even now, scattered wisps were streaming between him and the ocean, and it was just after a stratum of these had passed that he saw the single, speeding form of a pintail duck appear in graceful silhouette against the drab background of heaving water. It was a moment for quick action, and Wide-wing wasted no time. He rapidly gained a position above the drake and began his stoop with wonderful quickness and despatch.

Gauging his distance with admirable precision, he was only some fifty feet above the speeding drake when an astounding phenomenon occurred like a flash of light. With his eyes fast upon his intended quarry, the eagle sensed what seemed to be a gray streak pass beneath, and the drake disappeared completely, as though it had suddenly entered an area of invisibility. One moment it had been there, in full sight; the next—there was nothing. Nothing but the void of space between sea and sky, free even of the hurrying wisps of cloud.

In wondering amazement, Wide-wing instinctively checked his steep descent, leveling off on a straight course as his wings opened. For a few moments he could hardly credit his senses. The complete surprise, the utterly inexplicable vanishing of the quarry just as he was about to seize it, and the lack of any apparent cause even yet, brought a feeling of baffled indecision that was

entirely new to him. He swung about over the surf for a minute or two in aimless bewilderment, knowing not what course to pursue, nor where to turn. It had all happened so suddenly, so silently, so mysteriously, that he was uneasy.

It had clouded up considerably since he had first sighted the pintail, and now the sea was scarcely visible. He whirled about and headed toward the pine. Had it not been for this cloudy condition he would already have had an explanation of the drake's disappearance, but he had regained his look-out before the solution showed itself. As he alighted, even with wings still outstretched, he saw, passing the pine a few feet below him, a large, trimly built, dark gray shape—a bird whose like he had never seen before; and clutched in its gripping talons, the long neck trailing limply, was the body of the pintail drake.

In rigid amazement, Wide-wing saw the stranger gain the shelter of a thick live-oak and disappear amid the protecting screen of branches. For some minutes he sat utterly immovable, his brain grappling with the astounding truth. Such appalling audacity in a mere bird was truly novel. He could see from the brief glimpse afforded him that the stranger was much smaller than himself; but the wonderful speed it had shown, the hurricane fury of its attack on the swiftly flying duck, and its complete disappearance afterward,

gave proof that here was no ordinary bird. This stranger was no dweller in the Low Country.

Wide-wing's wondering surprise gradually gave way to anger—anger that rose quickly into a flame of fury. The audacity of the stranger—his easy interference—his seeming contempt in showing himself with the captured duck fairly under the very throne of the resident ruler of the region—the more Wide-wing considered these the higher his anger mounted into a consuming passion for revenge. Hot as was this sense of outraged dignity, however, a lingering, questioning uneasiness remained: a doubt as to who and what this gray stranger was, and where he had come from so silently and mysteriously. And well might the old white-headed sovereign of the island wonder, for the existence of such birds as this visitor was normally far beyond his ken.

Amid the branches of the oak, meanwhile, the disturber of the eagle's peace of mind was quickly rending the body of the drake into bloody fragments, which he bolted voraciously. As he sat there, satisfying an evidently long-sustained fast, his appearance might well arouse admiration. Of a clean-cut if somewhat stocky build, he was just about two feet in length, some eight inches shorter than the eagle. Except for his blackish head, all the upper parts were of a dark, bluish slate-color. A white line ran over the eyes and extended

slightly behind them. Beneath, he was beautifully and evenly marked with fine, wavy bars of gray and white in a softly blending effect. His dark beak was hooked, and the cruel-looking feet were armed with knife-edged talons. He was eminently a bird of prey, justly dreaded in that far northern country whence he had drifted before the storm.

Normally, this magnificent goshawk was a distinctly northern bird. Ranging throughout almost the whole of Canada, his tribe rarely ventured in winter as far south as the Virginia coast, but the unprecedented cold of this particular winter had driven many of them much beyond their usual range. A heavy northwest wind had blown this lone voyager far to the southward a day or so before, and finding hunting easy and abundant, he had drifted on until he came to the outlying chain of islands that fringed the Low Country coast.

On this afternoon he had but lately arrived near Wide-wing's island and had spied and given chase to the pintail while the eagle was swinging about on his afternoon patrol of the upper air. Because of the low clouds, the presence of the larger bird had remained unsuspected until the eagle began his stoop toward the drake. The goshawk was, at the time, still some distance behind his intended prey when Wide-wing began his descent, but such was the terrific velocity of the gray

stranger's speed that he had shot under the eagle and struck down the pintail before the white-headed bird's attack had fairly begun.

Now eagles were not unknown to him; in the northern country he had seen them rather frequently. But he had never had an encounter of any sort with the big birds, and so had more or less ignored their existence. When he saw Wide-wing, however, heading straight toward the drake that he had been chasing for some time, his fierce spirit flamed into instant anger, and, putting on a burst of speed, he had closed the gap between them with incredible swiftness and struck down the drake under the eagle's very eyes.

The flying cloud wrack aided him in escaping immediate detection. Upon the instant of striking the drake, which was covered by his gray body and was thus invisible against the neutral background of the water below, he had wheeled sharply to the right and dived into a thicker belt of mist that completely hid his presence from the bewildered eagle. Making a wide circle, he had then headed shoreward with unerring accuracy and, with his prey firmly grasped, had passed close under Wide-wing's perch, quite unintentionally but none the less openly, just as that badly puzzled bird had come to rest upon the pine. Proceeding onward to the live-oak he quickly made his meal, neither knowing nor caring about the conflicting play of wonder, anger, and desire

for revenge that was going on in the eagle's brain.

The night closed down shortly after, and both eagle and hawk composed themselves to rest, while the temperature slowly but surely dropped lower and lower. One or two flurries of sleet roused Wide-wing during the night, as the fine, hard particles rattled against the dry wood of the old pine; but, ruffling his plumage and drawing his head deeper between the broad shoulders he suffered no great inconvenience. The morning broke lowering and thick. A gusty northeast wind moaned and surged uneasily among the high branches and whipped the stiff palmetto fronds into a harshly rustling chorus. The ocean had a wicked, greasy look, and surged muddily along the beach in a strong, eddying current toward the south.

The spray of the breaking rollers blew backward from the ragged crests, and whipping instantly out of sight was lost in the gray murk that hung closely over the heaving, restless surface. It was cold—sharply, bitterly cold, with a strange, unusual bite in the air that presaged the approach of the almost unknown snow.

Toward noon, a flurry actually came. Wide-wing, still inactive on his look-out, was struck with amazement as the softly hurrying flakes appeared and whirled by him on the breast of the wind. In all his long existence it was his first sight of snow, and it mystified him. He looked down at his dark brown chest, on which the

flakes were beating, and watched them settle. Picking tentatively at them with his beak, he shook himself violently to rid his plumage of the clinging particles. The flurry passed quickly, however, and the slight trace of whiteness on the ground soon disappeared. Interesting though the experience had been, he bethought himself of food; swinging off his look-out, he flapped slowly out over the beach.

But even as he began his watch, he saw a gray shape emerge from the jungle, circle above the trees, and glide silently along the marshes of the back beach. His hunger forgotten, Wide-wing swung about and followed the gray phantom, scanning intently the edges of the tidal river and the brown expanse of mud flats. He longed to meet this gray visitor. He was conscious of an overpowering desire to close with him in mortal combat and show him that Wide-wing would brook no more poaching on his domain. He was burning to rid himself of what appeared to be a small but at the same time dangerous rival. But search the scene beneath him as he would, never a glimpse of the stranger did he catch. And yet the goshawk was not far away, for almost as soon as Wide-wing had reached the marshes, a slow-flying marsh-hen had risen from the flats and been struck down by a lightning pounce before it had even realized its danger.

Sitting on a confused mass of driftwood, the gray

killer was tearing the marsh-hen's body as Wide-wing passed overhead, and the eagle did not note, in the gray-white tangle of bleached limbs and branches, the inconspicuous shape of his Nemesis. Giving up his search at last, the old eagle turned seaward and patrolled the stretch of beach until a passing scaup duck fell victim to his aerial attack; and, carrying the limp body to the pine, he forgot for a while the presence of the stranger as he satisfied his hunger and rested afterwards.

The afternoon grew ever thicker. The gusty wind increased with a strange sighing moan. It whistled eerily through the gaunt branches of the look-out tree with a strident wail that seemed to hold in it something of a chill foreboding. The clouds dropped ever lower, seeming at times to touch the very surface of the tumbling waves below, only to rise hurriedly, waver strangely, and then go rocketing onward, torn into slithering strata or ragged gray-tinged streaks of vapor.

The palmetto fronds lashed about in a grating clamor, the great leaves every now and then crashing to the ground below in whirling, fan-like shapes of drab-brown. Frightened shore-birds crouched behind the protecting dunes, which were capped by the wildly thrashing stalks of sea-oats bent almost double in the rising fury of the storm. A sudden volley of sleet burst like machine-gun fire upon the island, beating a sharp, staccato note on the swaying trunks and tossing branches of

the trees. The flurry moved on out to sea, pock-marking the waves into a thousand little depressions, which leaped and closed together like miniature craters as the hissing surface smoothed again into wildly running hills of water. The leaden hue of the sky became darker and darker and the voice of the wind rose steadily to a shriek, like that of a lost soul far out amid the angry waters. The eerie, wailing cry sounded faintly at first but rapidly grew in volume until its wild note pervaded the entire island, then sank in sobbing, gurgling minor notes, to die away in a streaming whisper over the tortured stretches of sand and sea. It rose again—came clearer—howling, shrieking, tearing with clutching, rending icy fingers at the look-out tree—and upon that instant came the snow.

Not a passing flurry now, but almost a solid bank of fine, white, driving particles, flashing by with the speed of bullets, cutting, penetrating, burning everything with their stinging fury. The sea, the island, everything below, was blotted out in the swirling, eddying vortex while the wail of the wind rose and fell in terrifying cadence. Wide-wing, appalled by the tumult surging about him, clutched his perch with rigid talons and stared out into the white smother with a nameless dread gnawing at his brain.

And then, at the instant when the old pine rocked beneath him in the tempest, he saw the stranger.

Straight in, riding upon the wings of the storm he came, whirled about in the tortured air, the very incarnation of Arctic mystery. He drove straight toward the pine, lit upon a branch some ten feet below the staring eagle and, opening his trenchant beak, sent a wild, high-pitched scream into the very teeth of the rushing wind.

To the old eagle above, that ringing scream was a challenge to the death. Hesitating not an instant, he dropped from his reeling perch, swung swiftly around, and flashed with beating pinions full at the tense gray form beneath. The hawk, with the looming bulk of the eagle almost upon him, leaped swiftly upward. But one of the wide wings, threshing downward, caught him full across the front and hurled him into space like a feather before the wind. With incredible agility the gray stranger recovered his balance, swerved sharply aside, and, ducking under the body of the eagle, delivered a sweeping rake of the knife-edged talons at the dark brown breast before him. A crimson streak appeared on the eagle's plumage, a wild scream rang out, and the whirling gray phantom circled upward like a wraith into the driving snowflakes above the swaying look-out.

Wide-wing, seeing the quick ascent, slanted steeply upward also, turned about, and breasting the tempest on quivering, outspread wings, stared anxiously into the flying smother. Some sixth sense, an urgent prompting, caused him to drop suddenly downward and backward

just as a gray meteor shot down from the upper heights —a hard-feathered, compact body, with tightly clenched, steel-tensed talons. A glancing blow struck upon his snowy crown, and a sudden blotch showed vividly above one eye, oozing crimson drops into the yellow iris. Dazedly he shook the drops away, fighting for his sense of balance and direction, for the blow and the tumult of the elements confused him. As he slowly gained his faculties he realized that the driving flakes had lessened momentarily and that he could see more clearly.

Quickly he spiraled higher in short, upward-boring circles amid the screeching fury of the wind, and, peering with outstretched questing head, he saw the hawk curving upward from below in a steeply climbing angle. Instantly he closed his wings and pitched downward. Seeing that the angle was too steep, he gave two or three hurried thrusts, bent his head lower, and shot forward with redoubled speed. The hawk's senses warned him in the nick of time. Just as the eagle was upon him he threw himself quickly to the side and passed him by a foot, Wide-wing's stoop missing its mark by inches. As he shot by, the hawk's talons caught in the bend of the eagle's closed wing, and, whirled over by the impact, the hawk flattened himself upon Wide-wing's back, while the free foot ripped the dark feathers with flailing fury.

HE GLANCED UPWARD WITH A DESPAIRING SCREAM AS THE HUGE BULK OF THE EAGLE LOOMED DIRECTLY OVER HIM.

With a harsh scream, the eagle whirled over and over, but the gray phantom on his back was out of reach of beak and claw. A surging, stinging pain smote him in the ribs, as the steel-like talons of the hawk bit deeper. His side burned with an intolerable pang as he desperately strove to dislodge the gripping torment. Suddenly he spread his wings to the utmost, in an effort that undoubtedly saved his life.

That quick stretch, jerking his foot imprisoned in the elbow of the eagle's wing, was too much for the goshawk. With a strangled cry, he disengaged his punishing claws from Wide-wing's back. A sudden lurch of the eagle threw him off, and he hurtled downward like a rock, the torn muscles of his thigh drawing him into a contorted knot of pain.

Wide-wing seized the advantage like a flash. Hard upon the falling body he dropped, straight at it, with feet drawn up and tightly closed. Returning strength came at last to the hawk, and his wings suddenly shot outward, but too late. He glanced upward with a despairing scream as the huge bulk of the eagle loomed directly over him. There was a rush of air, and the gray body was blotted out—a crushing, sodden impact as the eagle's knob-like feet came in contact with the black crown below—and a dark gray shape, splashed with red, went hurtling toward the sea.

Down, down it went, through the driving flakes of

white, appearing darkly for a moment, then hardly visible, until, just above the leaping gray waves far beneath, it seemed to fade into the murk as though the spirit of the shrieking wind had borne its life away into the storm, as eerily and mysteriously as the bird had appeared.

And from above, as a wide-winged, snowy-headed shape was fading into the gray obscurity, there drifted back a wild, triumphant cry, which, snatched up by the tempest and hurled shoreward, came thinly to the island as but a distant echo that seemed to hover lingeringly over the lofty perch on the old, deep-rooted pine.

THE COMING OF THE RAINS

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A HEAVY, brooding silence hung over the old cypress swamp. Not a breath stirred, not a sound broke the stillness. The high, straight-trunked trees, soaring aloft to slender horizontal branches from which hanging banners of moss drooped downward, were touched with a soft, gray-green light that filtered through the interlacing limbs but hardly reached the moist, dark ground beneath. Here and there, black, stagnant pools of water shone like glass among the trunks, and even the air itself seemed petrified, as in the dim half-light the whole silent scene lay like some vast, long-forgotten painting.

The Low Country was in drought, and this great swamp, usually filled with wine-colored water, was almost dry—an unprecedented condition. Except for the little pools dotting the uneven floor of the swamp, no gleam of water showed. And because there was no water, there was but little life.

Suddenly, in the dark shadows, something moved. Hardly more than another shadow it seemed at first, but gradually it took shape, moved again, and halted at the edge of one of the little pools. A fickle beam of sunlight, finding a crevice in the high canopy above, shot toward the pool, to fall with startling clearness on a

huge form clothed in jet-black fur. Slowly swaying from side to side, his head held low, and his little red eyes searching the muck at the edge of the pool, was an old black bear. Even as he reached forth an armored paw and turned a piece of rotten log upward, the sun gleam left him and he merged once more into the shadows.

Ursus was unsatisfied, restless, and not a little uneasy. In all his long life in the Low Country he had never known such a drought. His hunting had been rudely cut short, his usual haunts were barren of food, and his recent foraging expeditions had been unproductive. All this had begun to tell on his temper. He was becoming morose, savage, and irritable, though normally he was good-natured. As he stood by the little pool this morning he was trying to make a meal on the scanty toadstools still growing there, but at best these were but insipid fare.

Earlier in the dry spell he had frequently come across fish which, finding their retreats rapidly drying up, had milled and weaved about the diminishing ponds in wild confusion, offering easy targets for the old bear's accurate paw. Now the ponds had gone, and so had the fish. What to eat and where to find it were his problems, and it was now very clear that he must forsake his swamp and seek new hunting grounds.

He had come to the swamp on a farewell hunt, so to

speak, with the lingering hope that something would present itself for the satisfaction of his appetite. But, search as he might, there was nothing more interesting than the toadstools. Wearying of them, after an hour's foraging, Ursus betook himself determinedly through the maze of trunks and threaded his way toward the slowly moving tidal river not many miles away.

Awkward he may have seemed, clumsy and uncouth, but no falling leaf in downward silent flight through space could have moved more soundlessly. He was but another of the black shadows, a shadow that floated steadily onward instead of lying motionless. Once, as he went, the high-pitched clarion call of a pileated woodpecker rang out overhead shattering the stillness, which immediately closed down again, all the more intense by contrast.

Ursus plodded onward and after some while the trees began to thin, it grew brighter ahead, and he finally emerged upon the edge of a wide, grass-grown area of lowland that stretched away in front to a low, thicket-encrusted bank, beyond which flowed the river. At intervals, from the swamp rim, crumbling banks led outward into this green expanse, and following one of these the bear continued his journey. Halfway to the river he stopped suddenly, his head held high, and as his eyes gleamed behind narrowed lids, he sniffed the air sharply and listened intently. Several yards ahead,

the reeds upon the bank swayed and shook in weaving confusion, and though the old bear could not see the cause of the disturbance a sound of muted snarling struck his keen ears.

Crouching low, and highly expectant, Ursus crept forward under the thick bushes, cautiously but rapidly. As he went, the sounds ceased, then after a few moments broke out afresh. Pushing soundlessly through the scrub, the old bear parted a thick cane clump and peered forth upon a desperate scene. In a trampled, mud-spattered opening close to the edge of an old canal, its right forefoot hard and fast in a steel trap, was an otter. Frothing with rage, flecked with bloody foam, its eyes gleaming with an insane fury, the maddened animal leaped upward as Ursus pushed through the canes and stopped before it.

The bear was no stranger to such scenes. He knew traps and their deadly workings, he had used them to his own ends ere now, and his mouth watered at the situation before him. That the otter was bereft of reason speedily became apparent as Ursus stepped forward. Hesitating not a moment, the trapped animal lunged like a dark streak straight for the bear's throat, and a snarling screech burst from its tortured lungs. The trap chain was long and scarcely hampered his leap at all.

In startled amazement Ursus crouched swiftly backward and, dodging aside, threw up his forearm to ward

off the attack. He was only partly successful. Although his movement broke the full force of the otter's spring, the bear's position was too low, and in a flash the brown-furred form had ducked under it, and fastened like a leech upon his flank, while the trap chain became entangled in the bear's paw. Uttering a grunting bawl of pain and surprise, Ursus reared upward, the otter hanging to his flank, and with a mighty sweep of his other paw broke the otter's hold, hurling it aside and wheeling quickly about in readiness for a renewal of the attack.

It was well that he did so, for no sooner had the otter touched the ground than it leaped once more, silently and lower down. But there was a difference now, for the bear was ready. His mighty paw flashed swiftly, in deadly, unerring aim, meeting the oncoming otter in mid-air, and in a limp, bloody heap the desperate animal crashed into the canes. In a flash, Ursus was upon it—a quick grab, and his jaws met through the otter's neck, as with a convulsive shudder the tense muscles relaxed, the blunt muzzle dropped downward, and its torture was over.

Giving a hasty lick or two at his torn side, Ursus, grumbling in heavy, smarting discomfort, tore savagely at the unresisting form, and squatting on the ground, fell to with busy jaws. His temper improved somewhat as his hunger decreased, and by the time the otter was

reduced to a mere scrap of skin and discarded fragments, the old bear was at peace with the world once more, though an occasional twinge in his flank reminded him that he had fully earned his repast.

After some minutes of licking his paws and smoothing his ruffled fur, Ursus continued on his way down the bank, and coming at last to the river, stared out over its slowly moving surface. Overhead swung a wide-winged osprey, and even as the bear watched, the big bird checked his flight, hovered a moment, and dropped downward like a stone toward the water. A cloud of spray leaped upward, almost hiding the bird, which immediately rose on a long slant skyward, a silvery gleaming shape struggling in its talons. Ursus gazed after it hungrily, not yet satisfied, then turned and shambled down the shore.

All through the afternoon he wandered on. Ever down the river he kept, and as dusk fell, he could see a wide marsh in front, stretching away to a dim bluish line of trees that marked one of the barrier islands fringing the Low Country coast. Ursus had never before been so near the sea, but even now he did not realize how near he was. He only knew that he was wandering in an aimless sort of way, and that since he had left his beloved swamp behind, one place was as good as another, and he cared not where he went.

As darkness came, he left the shore, and rambled

along an old causeway which brought him presently to a heavily grown hammock, or marsh island, dotted with palmettos and tough-branched cassina. Into one of these dense thickets he crawled, and composed himself to rest, his unusual afternoon jaunt having made him feel the need of it. He had eaten nothing since the otter, except a dead fish which he had found on the river bank, but even so his hunting that day had been better than usual, and he shortly fell into a doze.

There was a brilliant moon that night, and the marsh was soon bathed in its silvery glory. Black shadows lay across the little strip of beach that fringed the hammock, and the soft brightness awoke to enthusiasm a chuck-wills-widow, which, perched lengthwise on a branch just over Ursus' head, suddenly began to chant its clear-cut, insistent notes. The bear rose and yawned hugely. Then he lay for some time quite motionless, his head upon his paws, until his stomach urged him to activity, and emerging from the thicket, he stood under the whispering leaves of the palmettos and looked out into the moon-drenched night.

No sooner had his eyes roved over the little beach in front of him than they narrowed suddenly, and his big bulk shrank downward, grew tense and ready. Close by the marsh edge, nibbling at the shoots of a low-growing bush, was the squat form of a swamp rabbit. Ursus retreated noiselessly into the thicket, made a

slight detour behind a screen of myrtle bushes, and crept to a position that would allow of a sudden rush upon the unsuspecting little animal. Flat upon the ground under the myrtles, Ursus measured the distance carefully, gathered his muscles, and then charged out into the open like a huge, black thunderbolt.

Even as he started, something happened. In the midst of his rush, the bear knew that another was ahead of him—another that he had not seen at all, but it was now very much in the forefront, and had to be considered. From the other side of the rabbit a roundish white spot seemed to leap forward with wonderful speed. A thick, dark coil straightened out as though a steel spring had been released. Then the white spot was blotted out against the rabbit's fur, there was an agonized bleat of pain and terror, and the little animal fell sideways kicking violently, scattering the dirt and leaves.

Drawing back into a tight coil, its livid, white mouth stretched wide and its hideous, venomous head swaying from side to side, the deadly cotton-mouth moccasin stood guard over its victim, its unwinking eyes glaring upon the huge, lumbering form of the bear who, realizing that he was too late, veered aside in his charge with marvelous celerity and crashed off through the bushes with never a glance at the convulsively kicking rabbit.

The interference of the snake in snatching his prey

from before his very eyes put the old bear in a fine rage, but he was not rash enough to dispute the other's claim. Well he knew the latent power and deadly possibilities of that envenomed head, and he left the field without a moment's hesitation. Making toward the river again he gained the shore and continued his journey down stream.

As the eastern sky became shot through with streaks of light, the old bear came to a wide creek which cut the marsh, and coming to rest on the muddy bank he gazed out over the green stretches in front. The light, ever growing stronger, showed the line of trees on the barrier island plainly. He could see that they reached far out on each side, and that the island was quite large. Its unknown possibilities lured him, and plunging into the creek he swam across, and clambered out upon the opposite shore. In another half-hour he had traversed the intervening marshes, and came out upon the back beach of the island itself.

It was broad daylight now and Ursus surveyed his surroundings with interest. He set out forthwith, and after rambling the entire day realized that he was a stranger in a strange land. It did not begin to compare with his beloved swamp. He was assailed by a sudden desire to return thither and lose himself in the still fastnesses he was so familiar with, but the memory of its present destitute condition held him where he was.

After a few days on the island he realized that this new place offered something, at least, in the way of food, and so had a temporary attraction.

One afternoon he came across a huge, windblown tangle of heavy thickets amid a grove of towering pines. Finding a sizable log, partly hollow and half-buried in the screening dimness, he removed the pile of leaves and débris that clogged the cavity and curled himself in it. For some nights he had been sleeping pretty much where night found him, but from now on this became his headquarters. The soft, hollow thunder of the surf, breaking upon the outer beach, filled the air with a drowsy murmur, and as the big southern stars began to blaze through the falling dusk, he dropped his head upon his paws and lost in sleep his homesickness for the cypress gloom.

The clear whistle of a cardinal sitting on a cassina branch above his log was the next sound Ursus heard, and lifting his head he saw that another day had come. His stomach, too, gave notice that he must be up and doing, so he came forth from his snug retreat and began his morning hunting. It happened that he had not far to seek today. As he was passing one of the big pines an angry hum sounded apparently from beneath his feet and close to the trunk of the massive tree. A small, buzzing shape flashed by his nose, immediately followed by another and yet others.

Ursus turned toward the roots of the pine expectantly and ran a tentative paw into a small hollow showing in the ground. Instantly the hum grew louder; more buzzers appeared, and swarmed about his head on heavily whirring wings. Without further ado, the old bear fell to upon the hollow with energetic haste, and tearing aside both soil and bark, laid open a large cavity into the bees' retreat. Their concerted attack he minded not at all, keeping his head well down and burrowing deeper until he came to the store of honey placed well within the dark hollow.

Reaching eagerly into the sweet mess, he greedily licked his laden, sticky paws with grunting satisfaction, while the infuriated owners of the hive used their stings without avail. Squatting close to the ground Ursus ate steadily, and left only when his exploring paw could find no further treasure. Then, backing swiftly away, he turned about and ambled off through the thickets, followed by an excited escort of tiny, whirring shapes. As a dessert to his meal, he scooped up two or three unwary crabs along the back beach a little later, and then wandered into the jungle once more as the sun climbed in the clear, hot sky.

Ursus found that he liked the back beach much better than the front. Somehow, the vast stretch of water that lost itself on the far horizon impressed him strangely. Day after day, as he pursued his hunting in these un-

familiar surroundings, he never saw this great water still. Its eternal motion generated in him a restlessness, a persistent feeling of disquiet. On some days, it is true, it was much quieter than others, but always and ever the big rollers would heave onward to the sands in their never-ceasing thunder, no matter how little breeze was stirring or how smooth the water looked from a distance.

He longed more than ever for the still, dark water of his swamp, where breezes rarely blew and where the thunder of the surf was never heard. At times he would stand for long periods, his head held high, striving to catch the old, familiar scent of muck and the faint, elusive odor of the cypresses. He was going back some day, most surely, and he was only waiting for the rains to come and fill his forest once more with the wine-brown water he loved so well. Yes, after the rains came, he would go back.

Of the other denizens of the barrier island Ursus saw comparatively little. Swamp rabbits were common and he captured several, but of the raccoons, minks, and deer, he got but occasional glimpses. No doubt their awe of this big black stranger was sufficient to make them keep their distance, and none gave him opportunity for closer acquaintance, which was just as well from their point of view at least.

One morning he went to the sea beach and stood gazing out over the heaving expanse before him. It was

here that he sometimes saw the big white terns or the clumsy-looking pelicans carrying on their fishing, and he envied them the apparent ease with which they captured their finny prey. He often watched the old white-headed eagle take toll of the hard-working ospreys, and thrilled to the sight of the darting attack and high-handed tactics employed by the regal bird.

This morning, however, he did not remain long upon the strand. There was quite a wind blowing and the surf was running high. In wild confusion the breakers chased shoreward, filling the air with spume and loud-voiced clamor. The old bear shivered slightly and turned again into the jungle. He found the hunting poor that day, making a scanty meal upon a few scattered ant hills that he found in a clearing not far from his hollow log. Squatting on the ground, he tore open the teeming hills and greedily licked up the swarming ants that poured forth on every hand. When only a bare remnant remained among the short grass, he gave it up, and seeking the thicket, crawled into his retreat and fell into a fitful doze.

That afternoon, upon the southern horizon, a low-lying bank of cloud appeared. Small at first, it grew in size until it spread over much of the southern sky. The breeze grew stronger and veered sharply from one point of the compass to another, coming in short, heavy gusts. Suddenly a heavy rumble, faint and far away but dis-

tinctly audible and menacing in tone, broke the jungle solitude. A long, reverberating roll it was, fading to a muttering concussion as the last faint murmur died away. The cloud grew darker, but with a strange, yellowish tint along its lower edges. Great ragged mounds and billowing heads stood out from the dark crest and there was an occasional fitful gleam of slender, jagged lightning.

The denizens of the island were for the most part still. They seemed to sense the coming of some great unknown fear, the gathering of mighty elements. The spray blew backward from the rollers on the beach with a hurried, furtive motion, straight into the teeth of the wind. The waters inshore were roiled and muddy, and the current set strongly along the beach to the southward.

Ursus emerged from his hollow log as dusk closed down. He too felt the breathless suspense that overhung the island. He stood motionless, swinging his head gently, his keen nose searching the wandering air currents in eager, questioning sniffs. And then the gray half-light was suddenly blotted out, and a vivid flash of lightning glared with a blue-white radiance over beach and marsh and island as a crackling peal of thunder smote the air. Upon the broad leaves of the palmettos and the leafy canopy of the jungle came a quick, light pattering, which grew rapidly into a steady, rushing roar as the heavens opened and the streaming sheets of

water hurtled downward. Ursus lifted his head high and became as still as a statue of carven black marble. The rains had come.

For perhaps five minutes the old bear stood in the fury of the storm, his fur streaming with the rushing torrent, all unmindful of the dry retreat behind him. Then, suddenly his head lowered, his eyes gleamed redly through the gloom, his body tensed. Some strange scent had assailed the delicate nostrils and a crashing sound amid the dead branches of the thicket behind him caused him to wheel quickly about, just as another blinding flash of lightning split the murk overhead.

Sharply etched in the sudden radiance, careering through the drenched bushes in front of him, passed a frantic, terror-stricken hog. With its long legs working like mad, its head held low, and the razor-back bristling with upraised hair, it passed within ten feet of the watching bear, who, as the quick light faded, darted swiftly in pursuit. The scent was strong, and Ursus needed not the light to guide him. With wonderful speed his big bulk threaded the thickets; the bushes and grass drenching him with clinging drops, the fleeing pig barely fifty feet in front. And then, in a moment of time, something happened—something that could not be foreseen or avoided, and that crowded the following events into a whirling climax of relentless Nature's working.

Another crackling flash of lightning split the sky. Ursus saw the hog crash into what seemed to be a long, dark log beside a pool of black water. Saw this log suddenly spring into violent action as one end of it swung around in a vicious, sweeping arc. Saw the hog hurled aside in a squealing heap into the pool, and saw two huge tooth-studded jaws yawn cavernously into his very face. Then darkness—inky, pitch-black darkness. With a desperate effort the bear swerved aside to dodge the fearful apparition that the lightning had shown, and turned toward the pool, never knowing in his haste that in so doing he was taking the same direction that the huge alligator was taking to gain the water.

With his momentum hardly checked he came into violent contact with an armored, plated back, a booming roar sounded in his ears, and a mighty, clamping grip closed down about his left front leg.

With a bawl of mingled pain and startled fear, he jerked aside, whirling over his right paw in a smashing blow upon his adversary. The impact met the ridged, scaly back of the alligator just behind the head but slid harmlessly off the wet and well-nigh impenetrable hide. Ursus found himself being dragged forward, and in desperate, bawling rage fought that relentless grip fiercely, straining backward with his other feet firmly planted, and snapping and tearing at the hard rough nightmare of a head that held him.

A BOOMING ROAR SOUNDED IN HIS EARS, AND A MIGHTY, CLAMPING GRIP CLOSED DOWN ABOUT HIS LEFT FRONT LEG.

For a moment he was successful. He jerked the alligator backward for perhaps three feet, then in a violent lunge threw himself over the invisible form beneath and dealt it a mighty, swinging blow low down, which caught the lower jaw and throat of the huge saurian in a sweeping, ripping buffet. A smothered bellow burst out; blood, as cold as the rain itself, gushed suddenly over his furred forearm, and with a sudden, heavy jerk he freed his foot from the vindictive clutch. As he half turned and lunged straight for the alligator's side, a smash like that of a pile-driver smote him in the right flank, knocking him all but breathless and hurling him to the very edge of the pool.

Arching his body like a great bow, the alligator had swung his tail just at the moment when the bear jerked free, and shooting around with irresistible force, this mighty weapon caught Ursus full upon his right hindquarter and drove him gasping to the water's edge. Again the lightning flashed and the crashing thunder shook the ground in booming, terrifying confusion. By the glare, Ursus struggled to his feet and saw the hideous form of the alligator fairly on top of him. The huge jaws, the gleaming tusks, and the blood-spattered throat gave him the appearance of a very demon. Then, as the pitchy darkness came once more, the bear, with paw upraised, felt his guard beaten down before the furious onslaught of his foe.

Down into the water they crashed, the wide jaws clamped upon Ursus' left hind leg, and in a lunging dive the alligator bore him below the surface. Half-smothered, choking and desperate, Ursus raked and smote with his three free legs, unable to use his jaws—and all the while the deadly grip was bearing him relentlessly into the black depths where the alligator had his den.

Just as his breath was leaving him completely, the bear made a mighty effort that raised his head above the water, and gulping down a mouthful of air, he felt the grip upon his leg loosen, while in an upward, surging swing, the alligator rose almost half-clear of the water, hung for a moment and crashed downward full across the bear's back. Down they went once more, with the huge reptile clamped in a fresh hold about Ursus' neck. And as they sank, the bear's big form grew suddenly limp, his furious struggles ceased, and he became a dead weight as the water rushed into his bursting lungs. Slowly the two bodies sank downward.

Overhead the rain roared steadily down, beating the surface of the pool into a thousand little pits, and as a vivid flash of lightning once more rent the clouds and lit the scene with radiance, it gleamed pallidly upon the troubled water where widening ripples chased outward, bearing upon their little breaking crests, the crimson stain of blood.

The rains had come too late.

TROUBLED WATERS

TROUBLED WATERS

ALTHOUGH spring still held sway in the cypress swamp, it was unseasonably hot. The sun poured down a volume of rays which, untempered by any breeze, were fervent in intensity. While many of them failed to reach the ground under the tall cypresses on the edge of the lagoon, one wide shaft found an opening in the green canopy overhead and beamed upon a low, irregular mound of dirt and leaves. And it was this mound alone, in all that vast, still panorama of trees, moss and water, that showed signs of life and movement.

The leaves lying on it stirred slightly, little ridges appeared and wormed about over the rounded surface in tiny, noiseless undulations. After some minutes of restless movement, a little rounded muzzle appeared and pushed outward into the air, then another and another, until the mound was alive with a multitude of squirming, lizard-like forms, almost black in color and marked with vivid yellow cross-bands. In weaving confusion, the tiny shapes crawled down the slight slope; tumbling over one another; falling upon their backs, sides and bellies; kicking, writhing, but ever making toward the still lagoon, whose shallow edges waited the coming of the little alligators as the destination of their first journey.

The distance from the mound to the water was very short, only a few yards, but it was fraught with so much danger that some of the little saurians never reached their natural element. From a cypress branch, some fifty feet above the mound, the first movement of the tiny travelers had been noted by another dweller of the swamp. No sooner had the procession started than there was a sudden swishing of broad, white wings. A tall, slender giant alighted on the line of march, and a heavy, yellow beak darted downward, seized a black and yellow form and dashed it savagely against a nearby log. Again and again the egret struck, and each time one of the tiny wrigglers perished, while the rest, in frantic, unreasoning terror, scrambled around the feet of the big white killer, and gaining the edge of the lagoon disappeared under the protecting wine-brown water.

Swallowing his victims hastily and giving a shake or two to set his plumage, the glistening marauder sprang into the air and winged his way over the tops of the cypresses in slow, deliberate flight. The shaft of sunlight moved slowly on; the furrowed mound merged once more into the shadows of the forest floor, and silence dropped like a descending blanket amid the green gloom beneath the trees.

In the cool shallows, the little band of survivors scattered rapidly. In the numerous hiding places beneath submerged logs, trash and leaves, they found

abundant shelter and rested for a while from their strenuous introduction into life. Near the shoreline was a thickly growing clump of wampee, one broad, arrow-headed leaf drooping into the water and forming an admirable screen. In this secure retreat, one of the little saurians came to rest.

He had been the first of all the company to gain the water. When the egret had alighted among them, he had scurried under a piece of bark close at hand, and watching his chance, slipped out during the slaughter, and negotiated the few feet to the water in safety. Young though he was, he had used his head to advantage in his first life-and-death adventure, and his little eight-inch body was yet trembling from the exertion of his escape.

Slowly his sides ceased heaving and he became calmer. His tiny, vertical-pupilled eyes gazed in questioning wonder at the watery world about him, and it was not long before he noticed little moving forms upon the stalks of wampee and on the leaves about the bottom. Paddling closer, he opened his tiny jaws and snapped up the aquatic slugs and insects in voracious eagerness, finding that they were good. His hunting had begun, and it pleased him well for it satisfied an urgent internal longing.

His learning increased with the passing days. He found that the watery world held dangers just as fierce

as did the surrounding forest edges. He saw more than one of his fellows fall prey to larger relatives and discovered that the huge, bare-headed wood ibises were even greater foes than the herons and egrets that nested in the cypresses. Cunning raccoons watched the shallows patiently for any unwary little 'gator to venture within reach of their accurate paws, but none of these vicissitudes befell him. He learned to lie in unobtrusive quiet, only going about procuring his meals of insects, and as time passed, graduating to the catching of the quick minnows which swarmed the shallows.

So, though not blessed with any great amount of brain, Logo, the little alligator, grew as he learned, and learning, became more cunning, more voracious, and always bolder.

Clearly distinct on the sultry September air came the deep-toned baying of a pack of hounds. Far up in the pine woods was the sound, but the notes rose steadily higher, a full-throated, menacing cadence, drawing nearer to the river with each passing moment.

Upon the muddy shore, a long black object that had been lying as motionless as one of the many logs about raised a mighty head, listened intently, and with an awkward, lumbering movement, crawled into a clump of reeds at the side of a grass-grown ditch-bank and disappeared among the stems. The baying of the pack

was much nearer now and there was a note of victory in the cry. And then, from the forest rim a hundred yards away, burst the speeding form of a wide-antlered buck, spurning the earth in far-reaching, airy bounds.

His laboring sides and lolling tongue gave proof of his extremity. The chase had been long and cruel, and his relentless pursuers were ever closing the gap between them. Clearing the trees, the buck sped riverward along the old ditch-bank, crashing through the bushes and sawgrass in desperate, reckless haste. The trail opened somewhat near the river. Flashing by the last thick clump of reeds, the buck reached the end, and with a graceful leap rose into the air, crashed down into the water amid a white cloud of leaping spray, and struck out for the other shore.

No sooner had he commenced his swim than the leading dog appeared at the wooded end of the bank, and followed by the rest now, came yelping down the trail, nose to the ground. The big black-and-tan hound was fairly abreast of the last grass clump when a mighty, flail-like tail, ridged and plated with armored scales, shot outward in an irresistible, sweeping curve fairly across the narrow path.

The unfortunate dog never saw the doom that smote him. Fairly atop his lowered head came that deadly weapon in a crashing impact that jammed his head back between his shoulders. The blow lifted his whole body

into the air to whirl over and over, a mangled, bleeding mass as it crashed into the sawgrass and lay inert.

At the sound of the blow, the other hounds glanced up in startled wonder. The one next in line to the missing leader gave a hoarse, choked howl at what he saw in the trail before him. With open, cavernous jaws, a hideously massive monster blocked the way. Not only blocked it, but with an incredibly swift movement for all his vast bulk, lurched forward and brought those mighty jaws together in a crushing boom upon the second stupefied victim of his ambush.

Falling over each other in mad terror, the remaining dogs fled back up the ditch-bank, their yelps and howls of fear growing ever fainter and finally fading into the dim distance of the pinelands.

Meanwhile, the armored monster in evident satisfaction made a meal upon the second dog upon the spot, then lumbering through the reeds, he picked up the crushed remains of the first and plunged into the canal by the bank to disappear amid a swirling eddy of ripples. There was nothing about this scaly giant to suggest the tiny, frightened shape that had escaped the egret's notice years before, but it was the same alligator now grown large and mature. His yellow markings had long since faded, and now a uniform rusty black pervaded the whole upper head and back, while the underparts were a dull yellowish white.

In the low damp heat of the southern climate, his growth had been steady and anything but slow. Contrary to oft repeated assertions, the alligators of the Low Country grow surprisingly fast, and only four or five years intervene between hatching and maturity. So it had been with Logo. Now in his seventh year, he was just under eight feet in length, and wise with all the cunning which comes to one of his age in the struggle for existence. While his increase in length was marked, his girth was even more so. Behind the huge, ungainly head with its wicked tusks plainly visible, his body swelled out to massive proportions as far as the beginning of the long plated tail which, tapering off to a slender end, was flattened vertically and ridged in serrated, scaly segments.

Early in the spring, Logo had left the cypress lagoon that he had clung to since his early days, and had wandered down the canals and ditches of the old backwater until he came to the big ricefield beside the tidal river. In the high bank bordering the stream he had found a secure cavity beneath an ancient floodgate, which he had enlarged to suit his needs. Here he had taken up his abode during the summer and lived a life of ease and opulence, growing fat upon the fish that teemed in the canals, the razor-backed hogs that roamed the edges of the pinelands, and the gallinules and wood ducks that cruised the ponds.

If, however, there was one item on his varied bill of fare that claimed precedence over all the rest, it was the occasional roaming cur of the Low Country negro, or the valuable hunting hound of the white sportsman. Dogs he favored with an intense, never-cloying desire, and he let no opportunity pass to make a meal upon their delectable flesh. His exploit of ambuscading the deer hounds this September morning was nothing new. He had learned that the old ditch-bank was a favorite runway for the bucks and does of the pinelands when chased by the pack, and furnished a natural causeway for their inevitable dash for the river.

While perfectly capable of dealing with the slim dwellers of the woods, he invariably let them pass because of what followed on their trail, and the loud advertisement of their coming always gave him ample time for concealment in the grass. Any distant bark or yelp was enough to put him on the alert at once.

His recent capture made him content for some time. All that day and the next he lay unmoving in his den, emerging the following morning and mounting the bank to lie in watchful survey of what might chance his way. Some three hours of such sentinel duty brought no results. Nothing but the marsh wrens in the sawgrass or the passing blackbirds overhead disturbed the utter silence of the ricefield, and tiring of the sameness, Logo slid into the canal and swam slowly up the long stretch

of water until he came out into a wide, fairly open pond dotted here and there with clumps of bulrush and reeds.

Gliding up to one of these he lay alongside in the water, only his eyes and the tip of his snout appearing above the surface. Near at hand, a chorus of grunting, clacking notes sounded amid the grass clump, and in a short while a slaty-blue, red-billed bird emerged into the open water to paddle about the shallows with bobbing head and flirting tail. Steadily the feeding gallinule neared those three still knobs beside the bulrush clump. A quick lunge after a hovering insect brought it at length to within two feet of the motionless points.

Squarely in front of the startled bird, yawning jaws studded with gleaming tusks opened widely. With a squawk of terror it turned on whirling wings, but never gained the air. That it had to paddle along the surface before attaining flight was a fatal handicap. There came the rush of a long body behind it; the powerful swirling of a mighty tail churned the water, and the gaping jaws engulfed the luckless bird with a hollow, crashing boom. The black body slid slowly to a stop, the head rose and jerked sharply as the gallinule disappeared down the livid throat.

This small morsel was the total result of Logo's hunting for the day. He did not return to the den on the bank that night, but spent the hours of darkness in the pond, lying almost wholly in one spot throughout the

night; becoming ever hungrier as dawn streaked the eastern sky. As soon as it was fairly light he gave up his immobility and cruised about the pond on the look-out for anything edible. There were two or three other alligators bent upon the same mission, one of them, a six-footer, being particularly active.

It was this one who, some half-hour later, was Logo's rival in a wild race for a morsel that both of them spied at the same instant, and who, owing to a better start, beat his huge relative to the objective, thereby unconsciously doing Logo a valuable service. They were perhaps some thirty feet apart when, upon rounding a thick clump of sawgrass near the wood's edge, they saw at the same moment the body of a large chicken seemingly suspended in mid-air a foot above the water.

Both tails lashed the surface into sudden foam; both bodies surged forward in a quick rush, but because of the shorter angle between the prey and the smaller alligator, the latter reached the dangling chicken about five feet in advance of the onrushing Logo.

Rearing upward, the successful hunter seized the feathered body firmly, dropped his head and swerved aside at a sharp tangent to clear the course of the bigger reptile. Logo's sluggish blood was now thoroughly aroused, but before he could make the quick turn in pursuit of the audacious younger saurian a most amazing thing happened. The speeding form in front of him

was suddenly jerked to a complete standstill, swung violently about and thrown to one side, while a strangled bellow of rage and surprise burst from its opened jaws.

Logo pulled up short, veered aside, and raising his massive head, stared at the ensuing commotion with bulging eyes. In heavy, convulsive jerkings the other reared half his ugly body into the air, swinging his head violently from side to side in a mad effort to surge backward, but to no avail. Down he crashed into the water once more, the spray leaping high about the wallowing bulk. A sudden dart forward, then a wide swing aside followed, and again came the jerking stop, together with the enraged bellow of fear and anger.

Losing all control, the infuriated reptile rushed this way and that; up and down, forward and backward; plunging out of sight, only to reappear immediately in a welter of foam and spray, in which its writhing bulk loomed like some prehistoric monster. Exhausted at length, the long body stilled for a few moments and Logo sidled closer, to see at last the reason for these frantic outbursts.

Extending from the jaws of the now motionless alligator on the surface, up into the air and disappearing among the leaves of an overhanging tree at the water's edge, ran a thin, dark line. Inexplicable as this frail thing was, it evidently possessed the power of arresting the alligator's escape, and Logo, staring at it in wondering

bewilderment, felt a sudden twinge of vague alarm. Here was something that he could not understand, and the unseen force and element of mystery awoke in him an uneasy, restless wonder.

The period of inactivity of the part of the trapped alligator did not last long. In a fresh outburst of frenzied pullings and surgings, it attempted by every means within its power to win free of the iron grip of that thin line which anchored it to the swaying branch, but all efforts were fruitless. Logo, after an hour or so of watching the fate which he himself would have met had he been a few feet nearer at the outset, grew suddenly weary of the desperate spectacle, as if the efforts of the other had infected his own muscles with exhaustion; and still with that vague dread clinging to him, he turned and swam rapidly from the pond, gained the canal and headed toward the river.

He was not too disturbed, however, to forget his appetite, and snapped up a couple of black bass on the way. Crawling into his den, not altogether satisfied with the day's proceedings so far, he curled himself away to restless slumber, remaining in moody seclusion during the rest of the daylight hours.

The next morning, impelled by a strong desire to see what had become of the principal actor in yesterday's action, he returned to the pond and paddled silently

around the grass clumps until he reached the scene of conflict. Nothing stirred. Swimming closer, at length he saw the thin line running from the tree down into the water, now stretched and taut. Sinking below the surface, Logo immediately caught sight of the unfortunate victim, lying at full length upon the muddy bottom. Viewing it for some moments, he decided upon closer investigation, and was moving near when, with startling suddenness, the inanimate form was jerked ahead several feet and hauled upward, struggling feebly.

Evidently, this place of mystery held many secrets. Logo rose slowly upward, and cautiously protruded his knot-like eyes above the surface. What he saw was not reassuring. There on the bank in plain view were four men, hauling in the line hand over hand, while the all but exhausted creature at the end was being pulled ashore despite his last desperate struggles.

Now men were not unknown to Logo. He had seen them often in the past and had reason to respect them for their iron rule of the lesser kindred of the wild. With their presence, much of the mystery which surrounded the predicament of the other alligator disappeared. Although he did not understand the methods employed, the fact that men were at the bottom of it was quite enough for Logo. Lying absolutely motionless, he watched while the excited party hauled the victim

ashore; heard the sharp report of rifles; saw the convulsive movements of his smaller relative and the subsequent operations of the removal of the hide.

Perhaps he raised his head higher than was advisable; perhaps some movement betrayed him. Whichever it was, one of the men, rising to stretch his cramped legs, saw that massive form upon the surface of the pond, and reached over, picked up a rifle, and jerking it to his shoulder pressed the trigger. It was just as well that his aim was hurried. A stinging report broke the stillness; Logo felt a quick, smashing blow across the top of his head; a heavy concussion shook his very brain, while a greenish light danced before his eyes. With a surging plunge he disappeared amid a boil of muddy water, and rushed at top speed across the pond and into the long canal. Here he brought up on a matted growth of débris that clogged the channel, and clambering across in wild, unreasoning haste he shot into the water at the other side and continued toward his den on the bank.

The bullet had scored a deep groove clean across his flattened head, and a whitish streak tinged with red marked its hasty passage. He felt no great amount of pain, but a throbbing sort of weight seemed fixed there, and he shook his head violently from time to time, as if to throw it off. How very close he had been to death he did not realize, but he had learned that the man creatures were to be feared as well as respected. His

perilous experience left him with no desire for hunting that day. He remained in his den while the weight upon his head gradually eased away. Narrow indeed had been the margin between life and death, but even the more intelligent of the wild folks do not allow such things to worry them overlong. Logo had learned only too well that men were his enemies, and that sufficed.

The days of Indian Summer passed, and the fall was far advanced before cool weather came. Many alligators were abroad throughout this period, and Logo, despite plentiful competition, found the hunting good—so good indeed that he was among the very last to retire for the winter's sleep. The cold season in the Low Country is seldom severe, but Logo knew nothing of it. The occasional ice that skimmed the ricefields, the keen winds that swept the sawgrass, the rare phenomenon of snow, these he never knew. In his secure retreat under the bank, he was curled away in a kind of coma, his arrested vitality keeping up just sufficient circulation for continued life. A sudden warm spell would sometimes lure him out in the late months of winter, though he knew that this was but a mock of the languorous summers he loved so well.

So, almost always, he passed the time in complete lethargy, re-appearing only when spring returned to clothe the swamps and ricefields with vernal splendor and bring the gaily colored nonpareils and tanagers again

from the distant tropics. Logo grew in size and strength each year; his reign over the ricefields and river grew stronger until at length there were none who cared to dispute his right and title to anything that he might care to appropriate. His appetite was commensurate with his massive bulk, and the warm night air of spring and summer often resounded with his bellowing roars as he cruised the long canals.

Because of his peculiar cunning and his canny avoidance of danger in the shape of traps and mankind, the old alligator grew to enormous size. Few, indeed, of the Low Country saurians ever attain a length of ten feet, but Logo exceeded even this, and stretched a good two feet more. Truly, he was a monster; a relic of the dim and distant Age of Reptiles; uncouth, massive, but very much alive and very capable.

It seemed that the old alligator was to spend all of his many years in and about the river ricefield, but there came a time when fickle fate decreed a change of scene. He had so long ruled the region, and his invincibility had so cloaked him with solid invulnerability, that there was never an idea in his sluggish brain but that everything was subject to his rule. Mankind, of course, was the one exception, but this caused Logo little if any concern. His den in the bank continued to be his citadel, and throughout summer and winter it served him well.

It was early one summer that an unusually heavy rain

descended upon the Low Country. It began as a light drizzle that lasted intermittently for a day or two. Then the clouds became more and more ominous, until at length they closed over the entire heavens, and the occasional showers turned into a steady downpour that showed no signs of breaking. Not only about the ricefield-border tidal river did these conditions prevail; it was the same in the back country, and over all the vast coastal plain.

The drizzly days which preceded the rains and even the first day or two of the downpour caused Logo no inconvenience. He cruised about as usual, and only began to realize the disturbed condition of affairs when the canals and pond became so churned with mud and trash as to render fishing difficult; when the negroes' dogs clung close to the cabin yards and the semi-domesticated hogs of the pinelands sought the higher ridges behind the cypress swamp. His poor hunting at last got the better of his temper. He ranged further and further afield, using all of his cunning and lore to entrap some victim, but was seldom rewarded for his added labors.

He returned to his den late one afternoon in an extremely ill humor, curled his enormous length into the cavity, and tried to forget his clamoring interior in sleep. His awakening was rude and sudden. An hour after darkness fell, the river level, which had been rising higher, found the entrance to his den and immediately poured

in, swashing about the huge saurian as he slept. In startled wonder he roused up to investigate, and then went out of his den to find out what had happened. He could see absolutely nothing after he reached the soaking bank, and lay at full length in the drenched clump of sawgrass above his den, the roar of the downpour and the gurgling rush of the hurrying river filling the night with noise. Twice he moved his position as the waters crept higher. The water itself, of course, was nothing to him; but its unaccountable presence where it had no right to be made him anxious.

A slight lightening of the blackness, a smudge of gray in the gloom, at last heralded the dawn. As the feeble light grew stronger, the old alligator looked out upon a scene of turmoil that stirred his sluggish blood to quick apprehension. In swirling, eddying confusion, the surface of the usually placid river had become a mad cauldron. A succession of three-foot waves, their jagged crests bearing all manner of débris, spanned the river from bank to bank, and the latter showed only as thin ramparts against the tumbling masses of water on either side. Logo's wonder increased as more details appeared in the growing light.

What had once been chicken-houses, pig-pens and woodsheds went careening down the racing torrent before him. Cross-ties from inundated railroad tracks, overturned skiffs, canoes, and bateaux turning end for

end in the whirling maelstrom went rocketing past. Chairs, bits of planking, mattresses, and bed-posts represented the remains of negro cabins whose foundations had been swept away, and carcasses of cows and sheep were occasionally hurled upward from the surface. Soon the bank on which he lay began to disintegrate. Large chunks of it kept collapsing into the current, which surged and roared in angry clamoring at the very feet of the alarmed alligator. The whole structure trembled and vibrated as heavy logs and timbers were hurled against it.

Slowly at first, then with gathering speed, a twenty-foot section of the bank trembled violently, hesitated, caught, then crashed with a geyser of leaping spray into the cauldron beneath. Tense, frightened now and quiveringly alert, the huge saurian was hurled outward as though an unseen catapult had been released below him. Curving like an immense bow, he shot far out into the vortex, to crash amid a splashing smother into the racing flood.

Down he went, whirling over and over, twisted, wrenched, and tossed about as though his massive bulk were but a windblown leaf. Grimly he fought for balance; furiously he struggled, and managed, after a huge expenditure of effort, to gain the surface. Suddenly urging his muscles, he struck out with his mighty tail, beating the already foaming waters into a milky forth.

It was as if he had made no effort at all—he was utterly, hopelessly impotent to compete with that raging torrent. Realizing this quickly, he gave all of his attention to maintaining his equilibrium and setting a definite course.

Then the pouring rain began to slacken, and the distant shoreline of the forest became visible through the gray murk that had covered the waters. After what seemed an age, but was really not more than thirty minutes, great breaks appeared in the clouds above, and the rain ceased altogether. But the racing current never slackened, and Logo was hurried onward with fearful speed, gasping, struggling through the choking grasp of the ever-widening volume of water as it raced toward the sea.

Some ten miles had been covered thus when the flood, having gradually spread out over wider reaches of countryside, slackened its speed somewhat; and just as two wooded lines began to loom ahead, denoting the presence of the fringing barrier islands of the coast, Logo began to gain some headway in his swimming. He could do little as yet, however, and had to be careful of the masses of débris which kept swirling about him. The islands meanwhile were getting nearer, and a wide break between them indicated the inlet where the river emptied into the Atlantic ocean.

Logo did not know that he was being carried thither; he only realized that his efforts were beginning to take effect, and he doggedly fought his way onward to the

distant shoreline. He was gaining now, and would doubtless have reached his destination except for the workings of chance.

As he was surging along, the water suddenly shallowed under him as a big oyster-bank blocked the way. At that very moment he swung deeper to avoid a hurtling log that was careening down upon him. The near end of the heavy timber grounded on the bank, the mass of trash attached to it slid underneath and, helped by a high racing wave, lifted the far end into the air, swung it about with pile-driver force and crashed it down upon the alligator's head.

Had not Logo been slightly submerged, had not the water broken the impact, even his mighty skull could not have stood that smashing blow. As it was, he was knocked unconscious and swirled away in the grip of the tide, following the erratic course of the log that had served him so evilly. On went his inert body, turning and twisting; now under the surface, now on top, sweeping down the inlet between the islands and outward to the ocean.

The amazing vitality of the massive reptile, however, fought its way back to consciousness in a surprisingly short time. Although half-drowned and with reeling brain, Logo came to reasonable activity before he had gone a mile to sea. As soon as he was able, he raised his head and stared in bewilderment about him. His

momentum was greatly decreased and he moved slowly, for the power of the flood was dissipated in the vast sweep of the sea. Behind and to his left he caught a glimpse of the seaward side of the barrier island, thickly wooded and inviting.

Swinging about, he made his way slowly along; as he went his strength returned rapidly, and his movements became surer and more purposeful. He wondered greatly at the salty water, but was too intent upon making shore to give it much thought. The numbness passed from his brain, and his old resourcefulness was returning fast. True, he was somewhat tired and sore, but still in splendid shape considering what he had come through since dawn.

He had traversed perhaps a third of the distance to the beach, swimming easily, when without a moment's warning he felt a heavy, shocking impact from below, about midway of his belly, followed immediately by another at the base of his tail which stopped him instantly.

In the cool blue-green depths, a mile or two off-shore, something moved. A hideous, grayish mass it seemed, with no definite shape; an oblong, pulpy growth, with a huge parrot-like beak at one end set between two jet-black orbs. This beak slowly opened and closed with a methodical, sinister regularity. It was not so much the

central body, however, that inspired fear and loathing, horrible though that was. Worse, far, was what radiated from it—writhing and crawling in sinuous, terrifying silence were ten tremendously long and flexible arms, two much longer than the rest.

The monster, for it was nothing else, moved slowly along close to the bottom, seemingly propelled backward in a series of intermittent jerks, the outspread arms feeling and twisting here and there in eerie, fantastic gropings; now spread far apart, now bunched, but always with a sense of latent, irresistible power. Fully twenty-five feet the longest tentacles reached ahead of that pulsing body, ready at a moment's notice to spring and wrap themselves about a victim and draw it down to the horrible beak between the black circles that served the creature as eyes. Each of these fearful appendages was furnished with rows of plate-like discs, and the entire aspect of the monster was that of an apparition conjured up in a nightmare.

Then, for no apparent reason, the giant cuttle-fish sank to the bottom and remained motionless, those staring eyes fixed with a cold, malignant glare. The writhing arms sank softly to the sands, at ease now, but ready. A quick shadow fell across the bottom; steadily it neared the inert mass below, weaving and wavering through the cool gloom, as a wandering channel bass cruised idly

along at the surface. Just as the big silvery fish veered overhead, one of the waiting tentacles leaped upward in a lethal, striking motion.

It fastened full upon the belly of the bass, and the fish, sensing the impact, made a sudden forward surge with fins and tail. Then, instead of making the lightning dart that usually follows, the bass remained as stationary as though moored by a thousand-pound anchor. For perhaps ten seconds the monster below held the frantic fish in that vise-like grip, as a cat would a helpless mouse. Then, with an effortless, gliding motion, the tentacle contracted downward, drawing the furiously struggling victim slowly but surely to its doom.

In vain was the water sent swirling from those flailing fins. Tight-locked, the bass descended, then the cuttle-fish with a sudden, decisive sweep swung its arm swiftly, the rending beak gnashed savagely through the whirling clouds of disturbed sand, and in a single, sweeping stroke shore cleanly through the forty-pound fish as a knife goes through cheese. A convulsive shudder rippled the divided sections; again the beak opened and the monster engulfed one half and then the other in quick, consuming violence, sinking slowly back upon the bottom while the lethal tentacle drifted easily, lightly downward.

Gradually the water cleared; the particles of sand grew quiet and settled to the ocean floor, while the dim

green light filtered once again through the wavelets overhead, and all was still.

For an hour nothing moved—that is, nothing more than an occasional crab sidling along the bottom, or the faint flickering reflections of passing terns and skimmers overhead. The immobile cuttle took no notice of these minor movements. But at length a deeper shadow came; more than a shadow, for at the surface appeared a long, dark, tapering body, moving deliberately along by a waving motion of its tail which, even at a distance, gave proof that here was no mean traveler of the sea. Indeed, the closer it came the more apparent was the fact that the approaching shape bore no resemblance to any ocean dweller or to anything that the gigantic cuttle-fish had ever seen.

But this caused the motionless watcher on the ocean floor no concern. Fear was unknown to him; the bigger the victim, the bigger the meal and the more enjoyable the satisfaction over the capture. From the instant of the stranger's appearance, there was no doubt of its being attacked. All unconscious of what was toward, the queer shape at the surface continued to approach. Once it hesitated and raised its head, and again the cuttle was struck by its tremendous size. The moment that the stranger glided above the cuttle-fish, the two longest tentacles lying outstretched upon the sand leaped to silent, lightning activity.

Up they flashed, and fastened on the long body, one at the base of the waving tail and the other midway of the belly, momentarily arresting it completely. At once the grotesque attacker realized that it had met a worthy antagonist. The latter, instead of being held easily, lunged swiftly forward in a powerful, surging sweep, jerking the tentacles to their fullest extent and actually dragging the astounded cuttle-fish some three or four feet along the bottom. A dull rage flamed in the pulpy mass; three more waving arms flashed upward and wrapped their clinging embrace about the audacious stranger.

When Logo felt the first impact from that unseen force below, he acted without any idea of what he had to contend with. In startled amazement he involuntarily surged ahead, his armored tail driving him onward amid a boil of whitened water. He felt the iron grip give slightly and increased his efforts. It was then that the cuttle-fish brought his other fearful weapons into action and threw other tentacles about the alligator. One of them curled over him and fastened like a great leech upon his left side, another gripped about the neck, while the third, weaving uncertainly for a moment, finally found lodgment at the upper end of the massive tail.

These clinging anchors stopped the alarmed reptile. As they quickly contracted, and their terrible force began to draw him downward, the alligator's small brain

suddenly blazed into insane fury. Never had such an experience befallen him; never had any creature dared such desperate, cold-blooded ferocity. For a few moments he writhed impotently in that deadly embrace. His structural inability to turn his head easily was now a distinct disadvantage. Slowly he felt himself being dragged down, and so far he had not even seen the creature that was treating him so outrageously.

Suddenly relaxing all his muscles and contracting his body mightily, he felt a corresponding laxness in those clinging arms. Instantly he leaped to violent action. His massive body, bent like a bow, hung for a breath and then in overpowering, rending force sprang straight again. One by one he felt the grips about him loosen. He shot forward full six feet or more; then, rearing his huge head and elevating his mighty tail, he plunged downward in a swift, clean dive. Down, down, he drove, his eyes blazing greenly with insensate rage. He saw that great mass below, a nest of weaving arms and gnashing beak.

Unhesitatingly, he drove full at those staring black circles which marked the creature's head, but before his rush was half completed, a massive, darting streak crashed against his chest and held him off in plunging confusion while another wrenched him violently aside. With a super-effort he surged once more. His jaws gaped widely and caught that second tentacle fairly in

their shearing grasp, which divided it cleanly almost at its junction with the cuttle's body. But another came, and yet another, while he strove vainly to reach that gray monster squatting under him.

His mighty efforts were not entirely fruitless; suddenly the constriction about his chest loosened, and the cuttle-fish shot aside like a flash, whirling about in jets of rushing water, and attacked him at the right flank. Logo swung sharply around and seized another tentacle as it whisked by his head. With rending force he closed upon it, and the severed member dropped slowly down into the murky sand. Plunging upward with heavy, screw-like twists of his tail, the alligator fought his way to the surface, dragging the gray giant by main force with him.

Here he whirled again and lifted his tail high. Like a mighty loosened bow it crashed downward into the brine with a sharp, cracking report. Had that blow found its mark it would have crushed out the cuttle's life, but it only smote the monster a glancing buffet which served to tear loose yet another tentacle close to its roots. With a sudden spring, the cuttle came to closer grips; the water boiled; foamed and swirled about the thrashing forms as the two titanic adversaries lashed and tore. Fairly on Logo's back the gray demon gained a purchase, and the huge beak slashed at the tough hide in gnashing fury. Long red streaks marked its rending

jabs, while again and again the ridged tail of the alligator strove to find a mark for its crashing blows. A strong smell of musk pervaded the air as the scent glands under Logo's chin emitted their contents in fine, steamy jets of vapor, while the water about the combatants was blackened at intervals by an inky fluid ejected by the infuriated cuttle.

Locked together, they rolled and writhed in a desperate, savage embrace. With a sudden bellowing roar, the alligator began whirling over and over, his motion so violent that the cuttle was thrown aside. Darting upon him like a flash, Logo got in the first really decisive blow of the contest. The severing of his tentacles, while inconveniencing the monster, had only served to cut down his original tremendous advantage; the wounds were not fatal ones. But now the alligator had closed his jaws upon the rear part of the cuttle's body. With a bulldog tenacity he clung until a solid chunk of the gray mass parted from the main body, and lost him his brief advantage. A gush of the inky fluid shot full into Logo's face, choking him for the moment and totally obscuring his vision.

Now was the other's opportunity and he seized it quickly. Throwing four of his shorter arms about the alligator's body, he suddenly drew him, belly downward, to the gnashing beak. A burning pain shot through Logo's hind-quarters as the huge weapon bit into him,

and a wide gash crimsoned the waters with his cold blood.

And then, something snapped in the mighty saurian's brain. He became a raging fury of destruction. Rising swiftly to the discolored surface, he whirled about once more with a quick rotary motion, roaring like a steam siren in his titanic effort, and wrapped the tentacles about him in rapid folds that drew the straining cuttle to him. The cuttle's frantic efforts were in vain: its point of leverage was lost, and there was nothing on which to fix its grasp. In less time than it takes to tell, they were face to face. Again Logo contracted his muscles, again the tentacles relaxed—slightly, but enough.

As quickly as a striking snake the alligator leaped, a massive, raging engine of death. His cavernous jaws stretched to their utmost, a strangled, gurgling roar burst from them, and in rending fury the tooth-studded gates of doom crashed downward. Fairly upon the mottled, palpitating body between the staring black eyes fell that devastating assault. There was a sodden, watery concussion, and a column of spray leaped upward as the gray mass about the alligator's head slowly fell away. In two huge sections it sank downward; the lank arms unrolled limply from the still struggling Logo as he fought free of their dead embrace, and drifted away in severed, ragged chunks.

Slowly the troubled waters stilled, the discoloration

merged into the clear green of the brine and disappeared. Through the shimmering depths the brilliant sun shot a glancing ray to gleam dimly upon an inert, grayish blur upon the sand below.

With laboring sides and reeling brain, Logo lay for a while in the sparkling wavelets and collecting his all but exhausted resources. He had been sorely tried that day, and the end had come just in time, for his weariness was almost overwhelming. The wound in his belly was serious, and he realized that the hour just past had been the borderline between life and death. At last he turned his head once more toward the island, and swimming slowly, entered the surf in safety and was hurried onward to the beach.

Crawling ashore, he lay panting on the sand, the water running from him in little rivulets and collecting in a pool about him. Then slowly, painfully, he raised his head, and gathering his strength, moved ponderously toward the jungle-like growth beyond high-water mark, struggled through the low bushes under the trees, and slid softly into a still lagoon, bordered about by the rustling fronds of closely growing palmettos.

PUTOR—HIS LUCK

PUTOR—HIS LUCK

The still, wine-colored water just below the roots of the old pine on the bank broke suddenly into swirling confusion. There was a heavy boil, an agitated, whirling splash, and the gleam of a silvery body caught the newly risen sun in a glinting flash. Down it went, while a slim dark shape looped into view for a fleeting instant. Then, under the surface, two indistinct streaks showed near the bank, one light, the other dark; the latter seemed to overshadow the former suddenly; another swirl broke the surface, then silence.

The widening ripples chased shoreward, breaking upon the shelving bank in tiny waves, just as a small, lithe shape emerged from the river a few feet down the bank. Half in and half out of the water the slim form turned, disappeared for a moment, and again emerged dragging a shining trout up on the bank. Holding the fish firmly in his narrow jaws, the slim fisherman gazed about him with piercing eyes. A semi-submerged log a few feet distant caught his attention, and with a quick, supple gait he darted toward it, crouched upon the shoreward end, and began his meal.

Putor, the mink, was a handsome little animal. If his looks had a sinister, stealthy cast, he was none the less

handsome. His body was long and surprisingly slender, of a beautiful uniform dark brown; a white spot showed under his chin, and a long stripe of the same hue began upon his chest and ran between his short stout forelegs. His paws, which held the fish so firmly as he tore at it with his sharp teeth, were partly webbed between the toes, and covered with fine, short fur, while his round, tapering tail presented almost a bushy appearance. Perhaps it was his eyes that contributed most to his alert, intelligent bearing. Small they were, and dark, with a glowing intensity in their velvet depths that bespoke a spirit of restless domination and unquenchable courage. He was something under two feet in length, but he made up for the smallness of his body by the tireless energy with which he ruled it. Certain it was that none of the lesser kindred of Putor's domain held him in light esteem. He was feared and hated by many of the dwellers of the ricefield and river, and even the otters and raccoons of the tidal streams did not go out of their way to pick a quarrel with him.

After finishing the trout, Putor made his toilet, stretched luxuriously and yawned widely. Then he turned and made his way up the bank, and proceeding along the crest, rounded a sudden turn and came out upon a little promontory thickly grown in canes and smilax. Near the edge the vegetation fell away, and a little shelf carpeted with grasses overlooked the river.

PUTOR, THE MINK, WAS A HANDSOME LITTLE ANIMAL.

Dropping to his belly, Putor stretched himself in the warm grass, and resting his head upon his forepaws, gazed out over the scene in front with lazy contentment.

This outlook was one of his favorite haunts. It commanded a wide stretch of country, so he used it frequently. The grasses all but concealed him, and he could watch without being seen, an important factor in his daily life.

Out in front, the Low Country sun was flooding the ricefield with golden glory. A thickly grown bank bordered the slowly moving river to the right, and between it and the distant woods stretched the emerald expanse of sawgrass and bulrush, intersected into huge squares by the silvery threads of the old irrigating canals. Near Putor's look-out on the bank was the tottering remnant of an old flood-gate, or "trunk," its massive timbers hoary with age; below it, through an underground hole, the tides rose and fell upon the field.

If there was but little visible sign of life, the ricefield was nevertheless populous. Its inhabitants were vocally greeting the sunrise, and themselves could occasionally be seen. Near at hand, from a clump of arrow-leaved wampee, a gallinule was voicing its approval of conditions in a clacking, grunting discord of satisfaction. A king-rail answered from the sawgrass to the left, and a swimming coot in a nearby canal replied with a hasty echo. The flutings of blackbirds came from an island

across the river, and the strident note of a jay floated faintly from the distant forest. The hunting call of a swinging hawk, high up in the arching blue, drifted thinly down to field and river, but a jaunty marsh wren, tail atilt and clinging to the swaying grass stems, trilled out a bubble of happy notes as if there were no such things as hawks.

It was very restful and soothing, and under the influence of warmth and a full stomach, Putor dozed for some time, the comings and goings of the river dwellers all unnoticed. A kingfisher, swinging up to the old trunk on the bank and voicing his discordant rattle, awoke the sleeping mink. Raising his head from the grass, he stared at the crested fisherman on the flood-gate, then rose, shook himself with a sinuous, writhing motion, and slipped down the inside of the bank. Entering the canal in a clean dive, he swam rapidly across, and clambered out upon one of the crumbling check-banks of the rice-field. His ever-clamoring appetite was at work once more, demanding satisfaction.

Slipping easily through the tangle of canes, briars and vines, Putor came at length to an old log, lying almost across the bank. A perfect network of tiny trails ran around and under it. Crouching amid the canes he watched for half an hour without moving a muscle. Then suddenly, one of his ears twitched slightly, and his eyes glowed with eager intensity. A sound had come

faintly to his keen hearing—a tiny rustle, an almost inaudible stirring of the dead grass at the side of the log.

For a moment silence again; then, with another rustle, the sharp nose, two beady eyes, and short, squat body of a little animal appeared from under the log, and ventured a few feet into one of the runways. The cotton-rat sniffed sharply, with head held high, wrinkling his nose as the air currents passed, and then stiffening like a stone, gazed intently toward the canes. For perhaps a second the tableau lasted—then action.

With a short whirl the rat turned about and darted for the log. What seemed to be a dark brown streak left the cane clump in a long, soundless leap, seemed hardly to touch the ground, and flashed in pursuit. Just as the rat gained the darkness under the log, the swift doom behind overtook him. Two lightning paws crushed him to the earth, a snaky head darted outward, sharp jaws closed about his throat. With a convulsive, desperate effort he tried to draw himself into the hole immediately in front, but—too late. There was a choked squeal as the keen fangs of the killer met in the torn throat, a twitching of relaxed muscles, and the little, bead-like eyes closed forever.

Putor, growling softly, dragged the cotton-rat into the open and shook it savagely once or twice, then proceeded to regale himself on the warm blood. He ate hurriedly, tearing mouthfuls of the hot flesh in unnec-

essary, savage haste, and soon only a bloody smear in the runway marked the scene of death. Licking his lips, the mink passed his paws over his face, ran to the log, and sniffing here and there for a moment, disappeared silently down the bank, the grass stems trembling after his quick passage, while the noonday silence descended once more upon the old check-bank.

It was evident that autumn was on the wane in the Low Country. Although the afternoon was quite warm, it was with the transitory breath of Indian Summer; the fading forest leaves and the bleached straw color of the sawgrass were unmistakable signs that winter was not far off.

Putor gave the passing seasons but little thought. The dwellers of the ricefield whom he ruled were resident species, and only the bird life varied with the seasons. Much of this was constant too; the noisy gallinules and clacking rails remained. Flocks of mallard, teal, and pintail would soon drop down from the north to join the wood ducks, the latter being the sole members of their family to stay in the Low Country all the year.

For Putor the winter promised well, and he was content. It was not until late afternoon that he appeared again along the river bank. He usually spent most of the daylight hours snugly ensconced in a safe retreat or upon his look-out station on the bank, and used the hours of darkness for his ramblings. It was still daylight, how-

ever, when he slipped out near the old flood-gate and began his hunting. Sniffing about the tangled briars and smilax, he doubled here and there, quartering the banks and canals in restless, ever-growing impatience. For some time his efforts were fruitless. His stomach was complaining, and his temper grew worse and worse as his hunting continued.

After nearly an hour had passed he was savagely ready to attack anything in reason, or out of it, and it was in this mood that he came suddenly to the edge of a canal bank that shelved off to a dense, matted growth of sawgrass stems and floating débris protruding into a fairly open pond. As he peered through the thicket on the bank, he caught sight of a chubby, thick-set head, crowned by a pair of long ears laid flat back, cleaving the waters of the pond, and making straight toward the edge of the matted growth between him and the water. His eyes gleamed redly and he sank to his belly in the dense cover, tensed and ready. He could see that the marsh rabbit was a large one, and he knew that he would have to earn his supper thoroughly, but the lack of cotton-rats and marsh hens had made him ready for considerable trouble.

The rabbit came on steadily, gained the floating débris, and clambered out on it. There was no doubt at all of its being a big rabbit—it was the largest that Putor had ever seen. Coming straight for the bank, the rabbit

suddenly paused, sniffed, and sensed the impending danger. And at that instant, he saw a slim, dark shape flash toward him, open jaws yawned in his very face as with a quick movement he sidestepped and turned back toward the water. Although he had missed his spring, Putor was upon the rabbit in an instant, and the latter, realizing now that flight was impossible, fought with desperate courage.

The mink gained a grip at the base of one of the rabbit's ears, and growling savagely, jerked and pulled the brown-furred form down upon the matted grass. Straining with all his might, the rabbit squirmed and twisted upon his side, turning round and round as he strove to loosen the grip upon his head. His stout hind feet kicked out vigorously from time to time, thumping the mink heavily in the side and making the attacker growl furiously. One particularly healthy blow caught him for a moment off his guard, and the toenail of his antagonist gashed the brown hide. Involuntarily, his grasp loosened, and the rabbit jerked his head free, falling heavily upon the mink and crushing him into the stems.

The violent movements of the combatants had caused the whole mass to settle slightly, and the water crept up to the struggling forms, until splashes and jets shot up about them. From his semi-submerged position, Putor groped with his jaws at random, and closed upon one of the rabbit's forelegs. The latter, springing around, drew

the mink upward, whereupon Putor immediately released his grip and flashed for a throathold. Down went the rabbit's head into the water, which splashed into Putor's face, momentarily clouding his vision. Whirling about, the rabbit lashed out with both feet, caught the mink full in the side, and bowled him over.

Gathering his muscles, he leaped for the bank, but the insecure footing lost him his chance, for like a coiled snake Putor leaped upon his back. Reaching around and under the chin, his narrow jaws clamped upon the jugular vein, and sank inward. A strangled, bleating cry broke from the almost exhausted rabbit, and, kicking convulsively, it sank downward. Putor hung doggedly on, realizing that at last he held the advantage. With gasping earnestness the rabbit strove, with ever-weakening jerks, to free his throat, but to no purpose; for in a few moments the mink's teeth met, there was a sudden gush of crimson stream, and the long-eared head dropped limply downward.

Releasing his hold, Putor stood up, panting and trembling from his exertions. He was a disheveled-looking object, soaked to the skin, and plastered with bits of muddy grass, bleeding from his wounds, but—victorious. Seizing one of the rabbit's legs, he dragged it from the water to the bank, and with much ado, finally dropped in the dry grass, and fell to ravenously.

It was quite dark when he had finished, and an oc-

casional dash of rain hurried over the ricefield. Putor made his way down the bank, plunged into a canal, and regained dry ground at the foot of his look-out station. Just below the top of the bank was a dark opening into which he crept. He had, some time before, enlarged this cavity as a den, and now, curled up on the dry leaves and grass at the end of the short tunnel, he fell asleep.

For some two or three days afterward, the weather was cloudy and unsettled. A cool day and night were followed by a sultry spell which promised rain, and, in intermittent showers, it fell almost the whole of day. The four-footed denizens of the woods felt the unusual weather and were decidedly restless. Antlered bucks deserted the ditch-banks for the pinelands, raccoons and otters moved uncertainly about, and only the blackbirds and herons seemed unaffected by the general unrest.

By what instinct coming changes of weather are sensed by wild animals is not known, but they are good weather prophets. Within a week after his encounter with the rabbit Putor realized that a rainy spell had begun in earnest. He had sought his den after a rather unsatisfactory day, and, curled up in his dry nest, listened to the swish of the rain as it swept down upon the soaking ricefield at his door. Water meant little to him, and he gave the downpour small consideration. He had reason to take notice, however, when after a few hours he was amazed to see a trickle of water enter the mouth of his

tunnel and come seeping about him, inundating his hitherto dry retreat.

In some consternation, he left the burrow, and climbed the bank of his look-out. It was still dark, but the height of the water on the river side of the bank amazed him. He lay wet and uncomfortable until the dawn, and was awakened from an uneasy doze by a soft pounding of feet almost upon him. Starting upward, he glared into the half light to see a rabbit disappearing up the bank, followed by two or three scurrying rats.

As the light grew stronger he looked about him, hardly believing his eyes. The bank was but a thin line of ground between two vast sheets of water. To the left, the ricefield was completely submerged; the grass tops appeared here and there, but the banks and canals were invisible. The river on the other side was a swirling, hurrying liquid mass, eddying and boiling like a disturbed cauldron, bearing on its troubled surface logs, branches, and other débris in wild confusion. And over all, the rain poured ceaselessly, a seemingly unending torrent of falling water. Even as he looked, Putor saw the bodies of a hog and several chickens go swirling down the tide, and a mass of posts and planks that had formed part of a pig-pen careened rapidly by. A fall freshet, sweeping toward the sea, held the Low Country in its watery embrace.

The consternation among the dwellers on the shore

was intense. Rabbits, mice, rats, and even snakes swarmed on the few remaining bits of high ground that had not been submerged, and the rising waters bade fair to inundate even these last refuges. While water, as such, held no terrors for Putor, the unusual conditions, the evident fright written large upon his neighbors, and the streaming rain and angry river, struck him with sudden fear. He realized with new consternation that the bank on which he stood was steadily disappearing, and he looked eagerly, longingly, for some safe retreat.

Up the river, at that moment, appeared a dark mass that rapidly took shape as a log to which was attached two stout planks, the whole matted and clogged with branches, grass and trash. Down it came, several yards from the bank, turning slowly around in the current, but seemingly well above the wash of the water. As it came abreast of him, Putor dived cleanly from the bank and struck out toward it, resolved to try his fortune on what seemed to be a safe even if moving refuge. The current surged against him, carrying him with irresistible force on its troubled surface. Fighting desperately, dodging as best he could the smaller débris that threatened to bear him under, he finally managed to attain the log, and all but exhausted, clambered out upon it and sank panting on its wet surface.

Regaining his breath rapidly, he raised his head and looked about him, to find at once that he was not the

only passenger on the floating haven. Not three feet away, drenched to the skin and shivering with fear and discomfort, were four big cotton-rats. On the other end of the log squatted a pair of bedraggled marsh hens, while on the planks between these groups was an old raccoon, his sharp face all askew with wonder. On they went, this queer raft with its queer company, each a victim of the common fear, and none noticing the rest except to place as much room as possible between. Appetites and enmities were forgotten; the birds ignored the rats, the rats ignored the mink, while the latter scarcely knew that the raccoon was aboard. What a leveler of emotions is fear!

They had covered perhaps a mile when, from a part of the bank that was even then covered by a wave, a rabbit sprang into the stream and paddled desperately for the already populous raft. Putor watched the efforts of the animal with staring eyes. He saw it sink, rise again, battle doggedly with the rushing current, and then, with a narrowing of his pupils, saw a heavy log, whirling down the vortex, crash against the rabbit, hurling it violently aside. The brown form relaxed, the bulging eyes glazed over, and the roaring current, catching it in an eddy, tossed it onward, now on the surface, now beneath, another tragic bit of flotsam. Putor crouched closer to the log, and a soft whine trembled in his throat.

Almost in the middle of the river now—though, to be sure, the "middle" was lost in the wide-reaching expanse—the raft plunged onward. Often it was shaken heavily, as a log, a big tree branch, or some other object smote it. Once it tilted so far over that one of the rats lost its hold, and went shooting down the incline to disappear forever beneath the foaming surface. Putor looked longingly toward the distant line of woods, appearing only as an indistinct streak through the rushing rain, and knew that it would be madness to attempt to navigate the vast stretch of heaving water between. He only clung the closer, and with bated breath and fear-filled eyes awaited what might come.

All through the morning and early afternoon, the raft continued its erratic, drunken course. The rain slacked up and then diminished to a slow drizzle before dusk. As the shades of night were closing about them, Putor saw that they had left the line of trees behind, and were cruising on what seemed to be a veritable ocean, with clumps of oak and palmetto rising above the flood here and there like little islands. Far ahead, two more lines of trees appeared, with a wide opening in between them, and toward this break the raft appeared to be taking its way.

After a while, a star peeped out, then another and another, until the heavens blazed brilliantly, and only the earth seemed troubled. In the dim gleam, Putor

saw a dark mass rising at the left, and realized that the raft was near some shore. Its momentum now was considerably lessened, and, nerving himself to take the plunge, the mink dived overboard, and struck out strongly toward the blur in the darkness. Swimming easily and swiftly, he neared the mass of trees without accident, and soon afterward gained a sandy beach. Scrambling out in high spirits, he darted into a growth of underbrush, and entered the black gloom of the taller vegetation.

Finding a fallen tree, the wet and tired mink crept into a hollow, and was soon lost in a sound sleep. For hours he lay without moving a muscle, completely worn out, as the reaction of his battle with the waters claimed him. It was broad daylight when he awoke. Opening his eyes, memory rushed upon him; he started up and squirmed out into the bright sunshine, immediately beginning an investigation of his new surroundings. These surroundings proved as different as possible from his ricefield domain.

Putor found himself upon an island—an island that was long but narrow, washed on its eastern side by the great rollers of the Atlantic, a sheet of water whose vastness appalled the river-reared mink. He made his way out of the thick, jungle-like growth into which he had penetrated the night before, and emerged directly on the beach near high-water mark. He had heard the

soft thunder of the surf before the trees fell away in front, and his first view of the mighty waters made him turn again hurriedly toward the shadows. Not for long, however; his was an inquisitive spirit, and, his first impressions fading, he ventured forth upon the sands, and wandered southward along the beach.

Among the drifted piles of sedge he found a few crabs, and, ravenously hungry, partook heartily of his first sea-food. He came at last to the end of the island, and looked across a narrow inlet to where the wooded shore of another began. Glancing back up the ebbing tide that was swirling out of the inlet, he saw the widely curving river upon whose surface he had taken his wild ride the night before, saw where it wound between limitless stretches of salt marsh, between hammocks studded with oak and palmetto, whose thick growth he had seen the previous afternoon thrusting through the flood waters. The river was much more normal now, and the far-away woods of the mainland showed plainly in the morning sunlight.

Moving slowly along the back beach, he surprised an unwary marsh hen dabbling on the edge of the mud and marsh, and as, with a startled squawk, the awkward bird took wing, he leaped like an uncoiled spring upon its back, bearing it thrashing and clacking to the ground, where his sharp teeth made short work of the palatable flesh. His appetite was satisfied for the time being, and

Putor decided that he had come upon good hunting grounds. But he still felt somewhat jaded from his severe experience, and so he sought the jungle once more, near the fringe of growth that bordered the marsh, and slipping into a hollow stump curled himself to sleep.

It was not long after the mink's arrival on the island that winter descended upon the Low Country. Though it made no great difference in the looks of the evergreen vegetation of the oaks, cassina and palmetto of the jungle, the air along the beaches and marshes was biting in its intensity. One morning Putor, coming to the big pond buried among the trees near the end of the island, found its edges rimmed with ice. The wind howled down from the northeast for days, bringing hordes of ducks with its boreal breath. Mergansers and scaups, buffle-heads and scoters dived and splashed in the breakers off-shore and in the creek behind the island. The wide-winged ospreys, whose fishing tactics had always excited Putor's admiration and envy, had departed for warmer climes, leaving the old eagle who ruled the barrier island to do his own fishing, or levy toll among the ever-increasing flocks of wildfowl.

For perhaps a month Putor lived in easy comfort. His fur was in splendid condition, thick and warm, and the marsh hens in the reeds, the crabs along the shore, and the rabbits in the jungle, afforded him fat and abun-

dant fare. The wild life of the barrier beach, with the exception of the little shore-birds, did not vary markedly from the familiar ricefield population that Putor knew so well. But one day he saw a stranger, a stranger who impressed him forcibly, for the circumstances under which Putor saw him left no doubt that for agility, strength, and dominance the wanderer was no ordinary tramp.

It was early one morning, and Putor was stalking some marsh hens that were feeding on a muddy point. Worming his way through the stems, the mink had arrived at the edge and was gathering his muscles for a spring, when a whistling rush of air sounded overhead and he glanced sharply upward. What he saw drove all thought of the marsh hens from his mind. Hurtling along, at rocket-like speed, his small wings driving the heavy body onward with wonderful velocity, was a golden-eye drake. The high, shrill whistling of his laboring pinions seemed to hold a note of despair, and well they might, for there was that upon the drake's trail which brought terror to his heart and made Putor, down below, stare with bulging eyes at the grim pursuer.

Hardly ten feet in the rear, on flashing wings that moved without a sound, was a large, round-headed, yellow-eyed bird. It was his plumage that amazed the mink. Snow-white it was, with a tinge of yellow on the

EVEN AS HE STARED, PUTOR SAW THE GAP BETWEEN THE GHOSTLY PURSUER AND THE DRAKE CLOSE WITH STARTLING SUDDENNESS.

breast, and on the broad forehead a fleck or two of brown. Even as he stared, Putor saw the gap between the ghostly pursuer and the drake close with startling suddenness—saw a pair of armored feet shoot forward, saw the body rear slightly, and the black talons drive into the side of the luckless golden-eye. There was one short squawk, and the head and neck dropped limply downward. The white marauder swung about in a wide curve, his laboring wings still silent as death, and glided to a drift log stranded on the sandy border of the marsh. With a smothered growl rumbling in his throat, Putor slipped back into the stems, gained the trees and disappeared.

Throughout the day his mind kept returning to that meteoric chase above the marshes. Putor knew owls slightly. He had seen the pale, tawny barn-owls of the ricefields, and on rare occasions the larger barred fellows of the cypress swamps, and while he somehow recognized this white hunter as an owl, he had never known such a dashing, overwhelming method of attack, such dizzy speed, such masterly handling of a chase.

He could not know that the object of his wonder was an accidental wanderer, or that the severe cold that wrapped the Low Country in its frigid embrace had brought the stranger down. He did not know that among the ice and snows of the far-away Arctic tundras this

huge, ghostly visitor was lord of all he surveyed. He did not know that it was a Snowy Owl of the North Country.

It was evident that the white stranger considered the island a good stopping place. For some days Putor caught passing glimpses of him on his hunts, but got no nearer views. And then several days went by with no signs of the ghostly bird, and the mink had all but forgotten him. The cold continued, and the north wind still roared over the island, but with somewhat less intensity, and a break in the weather seemed imminent.

Late one afternoon, Putor decided to vary his hunting in the marsh by investigating the possibilities of the wide creek that ran behind the island. A small flock of hooded mergansers swimming near the edge of the marsh prompted his ever-ready appetite, and, watching the slow progress of the leading drake toward a jutting clump of reeds, the mink slipped around, crept out to the growth at the water's edge, and crouched closely. The drake, with his conspicuous black and white crest flaring high, would evidently clear the point by a good six feet. As he came nearly abreast, Putor wormed silently into the water, and gauging his distance, dived and swam under water, swiftly outward. In a moment or two, the loom of the drake showed directly over him.

He flashed upward, breaking water immediately in front of the totally unsuspicious bird, and his narrow

jaws fastened on his victim's neck. There was a hoarse grunt of amazement and terror; the drake reared upward and fell on his side, twisting and splashing. Putor's grip was not sufficiently strong, and he was in danger of losing it through the violent plunges of the bird. Shifting his hold like a flash, he gained another higher up, and despite the efforts of his victim, hung doggedly on, until, with a spasmodic quiver, the merganser collapsed limply to the water. He now released the body, and was trying to grasp the base of one of the wings in order to tow the bird ashore, when a startling interruption occurred.

He had dived under the drake, his body close to it, and had only just procured a hold, when a sudden burning pain shot through his back near the hind legs, and to his utter amazement he, together with the drake, was lifted into the air. As the water dropped away beneath, he whirled about, still conscious of the sharp pain, and saw, close above, a heavy, feathered leg, a glistening, compact white body, and a wide, silent wing, beating over him. A frenzy of terror struck him.

During Putor's encounter with the drake, the violent flapping and plunging of the latter had been watched by keen eyes from above. As the mink's first attack upon the bird took place, the big white owl was cruising over the marsh. The antics of the merganser caught the hard, yellow eyes at once, and after circling about for a few

moments without seeing the reason for the bird's actions, the white stranger slanted down, his feet shot out, and clamped tightly into the drake's sides. The vicious stroke was delivered even below the surface, and it was this fact that caused trouble; for, in the vise-like clutch, one of the keen talons ripped through a fold of the mink's skin as its body pressed against the drake, and pinned him tightly. With heavy flapping, the white owl rose slowly from the water, as yet unconscious of his double burden; but he was speedily informed of Putor's presence.

As the mink realized that the owl really had him in his grip, his terror doubled his natural ferocity. Like a striking snake he writhed upward, and drove his fangs into the snowy body above him. His narrow jaws closed only upon feathers. Changing his direction, he struck at the leg. The owl lurched violently, swung about in a drunken curve, and reached frantically downward with rending beak. But the body of the drake almost completely shielded the mink and this put the big bird at a distinct disadvantage. He attempted to disengage his talons, but the lack of leverage and the insistent assaults upon his leg and thigh confused him. Again he attempted to use his beak, and again he failed.

Putor twisted and turned, snapped and snarled, the pain of the wound in his back driving him nearly crazy with rage and fright. As the strange trio took their airy way, the marsh below gave place to the trees of the

island; the trees passed, and then the hard, smooth beach merged into the clear green of the sea, beyond the creaming surf. A hurried glance below nerved Putor to a supreme effort. Rearing as high as possible, he fastened on the base of the owl's wing, and bit in savagely. Another violent lurch followed, but the mink maintained his desperate hold. Suddenly the owl disengaged his right foot, the body of the drake swung to one side, and grasping it now with his free foot, the bird tore his left out of the carcass with a wrench that all but threw him on his back.

Down dropped the merganser like a plummet, and Putor was now free except for his bulldog grip on the wing. Just as his senses seemed to be leaving him, he felt a bone, crunched with all his might, and felt the wide wing sag. Down dropped owl and mink together, turning over and over as they gathered momentum. About twenty feet from the water Putor was thrown violently aside, his hold broken. Even as he shot downward he saw, gliding along in the green water beneath, a huge, triangular fin on a long, gray tapering body.

An instant later, he crashed into the sea, head foremost. Regaining the surface, gasping, he caught sight of the floundering body of the owl only a few feet distant. As he looked, there was a silvery flash, and a huge, undershot mouth, yawning widely, engulfed the body of the owl between rows of sharp, serrated teeth. A flash

of gray shone out as the shark turned, there was a flick of a long, vertical tail, and Putor, his heart pounding furiously, whirled about and swam desperately shoreward.

He swept in on the crest of a long roller, and was thrown forward in a yeasty, tumbling mass of foam. Striking out once more, he fought his way into the shallows, and gained the beach. Crawling ashore he stood trembling on the sands, then turned and stared seaward. Far out, beyond the breakers, a triangular fin was cleaving the surface in a widening wedge of ripples, ever growing smaller, and then it suddenly disappeared beneath the waters.

Whimpering softly, the mink crossed the hard, damp sand, passed the sedge line at high-water mark, and disappeared under the trees that bordered the beach.

YELLOWHEAD

YELLOWHEAD

Something was emerging from the wash of the surf. Through the wall of an advancing wave protruded an armored head and a horny, massive beak like that of an immense parrot; a wing-like flipper flashed and was blotted out as the creaming breaker crashed in soft thunder upon the sand. Then, amidst the turmoil of the next, a broad plated back broke the frothing surface, and, lifted onward by the urge of the roller, heaved ponderously forward into the shallows, to come to rest upon the wet sands, the receding water pouring over the rounded sloping back in a smoothly rushing torrent.

For a moment this visitor from the deep remained quite motionless, in all of its grotesque massiveness, then began to move. Out from the reaching wash of the tide it came, straight out upon the hard-packed beach, toward the dunes above the high-water mark, a slow, laborious, creeping advance, which left a double line of churned-up sand behind.

In its deliberate, measured movements this armored monster, full four feet long, its wet plated back glistening in the silver light of the moon, its heavy, massive head elevated and stretched slightly forward, seemed to typify the inscrutable mystery of the great deep whence it

had come. Something of the long-ago, an atmosphere of ancient ages, echoes of forgotten legends, seemed to hover over the lumbering form.

From that reservoir of life, that birthplace—and tomb—of a thousand mysteries, that realm of shadowy, little-known creatures, had this creature appeared, and, now ashore, seemed strangely out of place; seemed lost, as if, deprived of its watery element, bewilderment had seized it and it knew not the surroundings to which it had come so silently.

But it was not lost, nor bewildered. Straight on toward the dunes it moved, and having come to the dry and yielding sand it stopped, and in an unhurried, methodical way began to scoop out a shallow, rounded depression. In this it squatted for some time while the night life of the barrier beach went on about it.

A soft breeze drifted over the dunes from seaward, the graceful heads of the rankly growing sea-oats bowing to its touch. Pallid sand-crabs moved about with mincing, sidewise gait, flashing away like elusive streaks at an alarm; dainty little beach mice played and scampered here and there in their nocturnal merriment. Over all, riding high in the soft canopy arching overhead, the brilliant southern moon poured down a flood of silver radiance over sand and sea.

Crawling at last out of the hole in the sand, the ungainly monster scooped back into the bowl-like cavity

the mounds of thrown-up sand, which as it fell, covered a multitude of small spherical objects lying in the bottom and shining white in the moonlight. When the worker had filled the hole, and leveled it off roughly by raising its huge body on its flippers and letting it fall, the lumbering shape turned once more toward the sea. Slowly making its way across the beach, it headed straight into the surf, heaved through the shallows, and disappeared into the breast of an oncoming wave.

Then, out beyond the breakers, a beaked head broke the surface, there was a long-drawn hissing breath, and only a swirling eddy marked the silent water, as the old Loggerhead Turtle sought the unknown depths.

Some two months after the old turtle swam ashore that moonlight night to lay her eggs among the dunes, there came an afternoon when the sand in the filled depression showed unmistakable signs of life beneath. Little mounds rose here and there, cracks seamed the irregular surface, and then one after another, tiny heads popped up, gazed about, and struggled upward through the yielding grains.

They continued to appear until several score of the little creatures were clear of their confinement, when with one accord they immediately began to make their way toward the ocean. Not in any haphazard, roundabout way did they go, but directly toward the beach, although

to their eyes the sea was yet invisible. Scrambling onward, sliding down some slight declivity, perhaps becoming completely turned about, they at once switched around and unerringly faced the surf.

Well in the vanguard of the miniature turtle squadron was one individual that differed markedly from his tiny companions. Slightly larger than the rest, he measured a full two and a half inches from one end of his shell to the other, and his progress was more determined and direct than any of the others. Not in size alone did this youngster differ. By some inexplicable caprice, Nature had given him a birthmark that was to remain with him through life: on the top of the otherwise uniformly dark-colored head there was an irregular blotch of yellow. How it came to differ there from the others, no one can tell, but the result was that this Loggerhead Turtle was later to be known as Yellowhead to many along the Low Country beaches.

And so, obeying the commands of instinct, those tiny creatures, whose age was measurable in minutes, were making for the sea. Their journey, though less than a hundred yards in length, was fraught with danger, and not all of the numerous family lived to complete it. As the straggling procession cleared the dry sand at high-water mark and began traversing the hard-packed beach, a shadow fell across their path.

With a swishing rush of air, a wide-winged monster

alighted fairly in the parade of plodding forms. A huge, unwieldy beak, from which depended a cavernous pouch, jabbed viciously here and there, and with each downward stroke picked one of the little forms from the sand. With clumsy haste the slow youngsters scattered as fast as possible from the beaked terror, but heavy toll was exacted from their ranks before they reached the water. Yellowhead, though knowing nothing of the ways of pelicans and their fondness for young turtles, was well aware that danger was represented in the big bird near him. As instinct had led him to the sea, so now it urged him onward, and working his finlike flippers as hard as he could, he gained the tide before any of his fellows and, plunging forward, quickly disappeared beneath the foamy surface.

It was well for him that the surf was light that day. Having little enough strength, at best, to battle with the waves, his frantic efforts to make the water had all but exhausted him, and he now endeavored, in several inches of water, to regain his spent forces. Then, swimming deep, he continued seaward and soon gained the comparative calm beyond the breakers, when he rose to the surface and lifted his little head above the water.

A short distance down the beach an inlet made in from the sea, dividing the barrier island that had been his birthplace from the next one in the coastal chain. Seeking the shallows, he made his way in once more and

soon came to the jutting point of the island, which he rounded, and so came to the inlet. Here he cruised the placid waters, which were sheltered from the breeze by the lee of the shore, and found that the wide inlet narrowed somewhat to a tidal river, which was rimmed along with vast stretches of salt marsh.

Coming closer in still, he gained the shadow of the marsh and lay quietly for a while among the protecting stems, his eyes and brain busily at work with the many and varied impressions that were crowding in upon them. He was considerably heartened before long to see several of his brothers and sisters who also had found their way thither, and they joined him at the marsh edge. Of the great majority of the family, however, he never had further knowledge. It was only on that brief journey to the beach that they had all been together, and some score of the little lives had been snuffed out before they reached their natural element.

Inactivity, however, soon came to an end. Already Yellowhead's appetite was beginning to assert itself, and moving slowly about the shallows he nibbled here and there at the marsh stems, gleaning a good meal from the thickly growing algae that coated the submerged portions of the rank grass. Tiny shrimp, agile though they were, fell victims to his little beak, and a sense of contentment began to possess the tiny turtle as the memory

of the winged killer of the beach gradually faded from his brain.

Alternate periods of feeding and resting occupied the whole of his time for several weeks. He grew steadily, if not with remarkable speed, and his excursions soon lengthened from a few yards to several hundreds. He explored the bottom of the tidal river with searching care and soon came to learn the hiding places of the little conchs in the muddy bottom, and to crush their fragile shells with his horny beak to get at the sweet morsel of flesh within. He liked to float at the surface too, but in his early weeks he learned that this was sometimes dangerous.

Watching from some safe point, he had seen the big white Royal Terns come plunging downward from the sky to smite the water heavily and rise again with a gleaming minnow transfixed by each bright red bill. He realized that, should one of these shining fishermen descend upon him like a bullet from above, he would never again see the river bottom or the marsh edges, and so he wisely kept well concealed and rose to the surface only when sure of adequate protection. During his meals on the submerged beds of eel-grass, he came into contact now and then with some of his small relatives, but on the whole Yellowhead lived a solitary life. It was, however, while in company with two of those oc-

casional companions that he received the second fright of his existence, although the perpetrator's intentions were not directed at all against him or the other youngsters.

Swimming slowly along together, the three had come across a floating piece of timber, seamed with cracks and ridges that offered concealment. Clambering out of the water, they ensconced themselves in convenient cracks and with lazy interest surveyed the scene from their crude craft. For some time quiet reigned and danger seemed very remote. But just as they were dozing off to undisturbed slumber, there was a rippling of the water some distance up the river. It drew closer to their refuge, and shortly attracted their attention.

Little waves glided along in a washing murmur from the advancing disturbance, flashes of silver came, and were gone among the dancing ripples, as the school of mullet came humming down the stream, engaged in happy, carefree play. And then, some distance behind them, a rounded glistening back topped by a high black fin broke the surface. A sudden boiling surge appeared at the far end of the mullet school, and the frightened fish rushed headlong, as the porpoise drove into their thickly crowded ranks. Straight toward the piece of floating débris they came, a high white wave that rolled swiftly along indicating the approach of the destructive disturber of the peace.

He was playing havoc with the mullet. His snapping jaws worked rapidly and his little eyes seemed to gleam with a malicious light as his beaked head came occasionally into view. The school passed not three feet from the apprehensive little turtles. One glimpse they had of the fleeing fish, of the toothed jaws, of the looming bulk of the porpoise. The wall of water that reared before him crashed down upon the timber, which an instant later was tossed upward by a flick of the passing porpoise's tail.

The three observers were projected into space in different directions as though by a catapult, and, turning over and over, splashed into the water fully fifteen feet away. Yellowhead, upon arriving at the surface, was still in possession of his wits, and swam frantically downward, making for the marsh as rapidly as possible. Had the tail of the porpoise struck the timber from above rather than below, his career would have come to a close at the instant of the impact; but as it was, he was only badly scared and somewhat shaken. He lay quietly for some time, collecting his senses. Already he had come unscathed through two life-and-death adventures in his short life, and it was becoming evident to him that the way of the young turtle is not easy.

As soon as the air was first touched by winter's cold, Yellowhead grew restless. He ranged uneasily up and down the river, and explored every creek and estuary

that he found. His diet was much the same, occasionally varied by minnows, but they were rather too agile for him to catch many. He delighted in the conchs and was now able to crush larger ones. The beds of submerged grass and seaweed, however, still formed the greater part of his food, and there was no lack of these.

And then one day, he voyaged down the inlet and headed out to sea. Not a tentative trip outside the line of breakers was this, for he continued past the white line of the bar and started on his first deep-sea wandering. An experience of a few days convinced him that this was his home. He reveled in the vast expanse of sandy bottom; the heaving surface was always swept by breeze; and the marine life all about him far exceeded that of the inlet. His size now allowed him to lie at the surface without fear of diving tern or swooping gull, and the ponderous pelicans had long since departed for more southern climes. He spent much time lying just awash, the waves breaking over his back in a soothing murmur, while his keen eyes searched the wide distances about him with nothing of fear in their expression. He had still, however, much to learn.

Yellowhead's life was for several years without untoward incident. During this time he grew slowly but steadily, thriving on his diet of vegetable and animal life, catching more fish now, always by strategy rather than speed. On the whole, his existence during his early years

could not be termed exciting. One day differed but little from another, and while he ranged over quite a wide territory he spent days about a single spot where food was plentiful. And it was plentiful in many of his haunts, the warm sea abounding in tidbits to his liking. He knew no other feeling than a lazy content, except on certain occasions when it was borne in upon his mind that there were other creatures of the sea that were more powerful than he.

Of these he often caught glimpses. During his early years he held in wholesome respect the swift, playful porpoises that roved about sometimes singly, sometimes in large schools, and that played havoc among the fish. He learned to keep a keen look-out, too, for those wide-mouthed monsters the sharks, and the sight of one of these voracious killers was enough to make him efface himself as quickly as possible. From a protecting screen of weed, or a piece of sunken wreckage, he had witnessed swift doom overtake two of his contemporaries, whether or not of the brood of which he was a member, he neither knew nor cared. But their desperate efforts to escape, the hopelessness of the race, and the quick turn of the pursuer, showing its whitish belly and tooth-filled jaws, made a profound impression on his mind.

He learned all these things by constant watching and from that age-old teacher, Instinct. He accepted the presence of shark and porpoise as the natural order of

life, just as he accepted the fact that the bits of seaweed and crawling conchs were food, and learned that the procuring of the latter must be attended by danger from the former. But this did not deter him. He lived on in watchful knowledge of his surroundings and continued to vindicate the adage that "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty."

It was not until he was quite advanced in age and cunning that he had his first experience with a power that had heretofore been utterly unknown to him. Whether it was because he kept well off-shore or because the waters thereabout were usually free from human visitation matters not. He had had no experience with any enemies except those that inhabited his own watery world. He had acquired a self-reliance that enabled him to take care of himself in almost any emergency; indeed, his increasing size was steadily building up for him a comparative immunity.

He had lately gone through one of his spells of roving and had come, in his wanderings, to a fruitful field of easy hunting. He had chanced one day to see ahead of him an indistinct mass looming up through the shimmering waters, a long, dark wall stretching away on either hand as far as he could see. Investigating this obstruction, he had found a jumbled, weed-grown rampart of huge rocks rising from the bed of the ocean toward the surface. He had followed this jagged barrier

for a long distance and wherever he came to the surface he saw that the rocks protruded either just above it or many feet into the air, depending upon the stage of the tide.

He did not know that it was a jetty that deepened the entrance to a wide harbor some miles distant, but he did know that the rocks afforded him an easy living, for small marine life swarmed about them, and the rocks themselves were covered with a rank growth of seaweed, sponges, barnacles and other items of his own particular bill-of-fare. The reason for their presence bothered him not at all. They were there and food was there, and in consequence he took up his abode near at hand.

Chancing to be browsing one morning among the rocks, his attention was arrested by an unusual sight. It was that of a "fiddler" crab, apparently trying to swim, but held immovable except for an occasional up-and-down movement no more than a foot in extent. Yellowhead watched it lazily at first, then with increasing interest. He moved up closer and watched again. It was something that he could not account for.

There was no doubt about it: the fiddler was certainly there, and was undoubtedly making frantic efforts to break away, but was unsuccessful. The sunlight streaming down through the clear green of the water made every detail plainly visible. About six feet out from the

wall of rock, which reared darkly upward, this singular phenomenon went on. Yellowhead then noted that the actions of the little crab were becoming less energetic, and that it was only after the up-and-down movement that it moved its legs.

Keen as the turtle's sight was, it failed to register one important fact. Straight up from the body of the fiddler toward the surface ran a thin line. Perhaps the shimmering lights and shadows about the rocks made it invisible; at any rate, it escaped Yellowhead's notice. The thought of the fiddler as a bit of food did, however, occur to him. Though but a morsel, it was there in front of him and required little effort to secure. He swam forward and, opening his beak, closed his jaws over the now motionless shape.

Instantly the unexpected happened. As he swung his flippers to turn about, his head was rudely jerked aside, and before he could take it in he was rising rapidly toward the surface, a heavy drag at his mouth pulling him upward. For a moment he was so amazed as to remain passive—but only for a moment. Returning instinct asserted itself and, with a mighty surge, his fin-like fore arms bore him sharply aside and downward. The pull at his mouth increased for a second or two, then lessened.

Down he went, almost unhindered, and reaching bottom came to rest, only to be heavily jerked once more.

Anger and fear fought for mastery in his brain; the latter won. Darting toward the rocks he thrust his head into a crevice and remained motionless. The pull again asserted itself and continued. As he shifted his head for a moment, it was suddenly jerked clear of the crevice and he found himself rising once more. At this stage, anger came to the front. Wildly he swung about, darting this way and that, downward, upward, once breaking the surface into a froth of foam. Down he went again, always with the inexorable drag at his jaw that alternately lessened and increased.

Then, opening his jaws, he snapped fiercely, feeling a thin, hard substance between them, but so far back as to be just out of reach of the cutting edges. His wild rushing about in this aimless manner had its effect. Tiring, he became quiet once more, but was not allowed to rest, for the upward pull began as soon as his resistance lessened. Not holding back this time he was pulled actually to the top, and was lifted almost a quarter of his length into the air by the unseen force.

An excited yell came to his ears, and into his startled vision burst the sight of two or three wildly gesticulating shapes upon the rocks, the like of which he had never imagined. Their movements, together with the volume of noise which came from them, fired him to convulsive action. Giving a tremendous sidewise lunge he disappeared in a swirl of foam, jerking his head fiercely back-

ward. This last effort was too much for the wire leader of the line.

Even as it snapped there was a slithering crack, as the rod that held it crumpled sharply, and the excited fisherman balancing on the wet rocks was all but precipitated into the water. He scrambled back to safety and sat panting.

"Did you see him?" he gasped, staring at his two wide-eyed companions.

"Sure, we saw him," answered one. "He gave you a hot time sure enough, but it was only a turtle."

"Yes," returned the unfortunate owner of the rod, "'only a turtle,' but did you notice his head?"

"I thought there was something about his head that was unusual," exclaimed the third man, "but what—?"

"Why, it was yellow," exclaimed the first speaker, "yellow as gold! Who ever saw a yellow-headed turtle?"

"Well, we have, at any rate," laughed one of the men, "though I must confess that a yellow-headed turtle is the last thing I expected to see today."

"The scoundrel cost me a good rod," moaned the perspiring victim, "but it was worth it to get a look at him, anyway."

Such was Yellowhead's introduction to mankind. It was a source of wonder to him, and from that day forward, the memory of the experience never left him. It

was the first time that he had ever noticed any of the inhabitants of the upper world except the birds. It was his first realization that living things—other than birds—inhabited the upper spaces, and the knowledge awakened a queer mixture of emotions in his reptilian brain.

Little though he did know, he was sure that these new creatures were dangerous. There was nothing doubtful about this point, at least. The only ones he had ever come into contact with had proved this, and if there were more of them, why should they too not be dangerous? Along with this impression came a desire to see and know something more about the queer beings who frequented the upper air.

It was some time before Yellowhead put this desire into practice. For some days after his escape from the jetty fisherman, he employed himself in efforts to rid his jaw of the hook and the trailing leader. Frequent and energetic rubbing against the rocks finally accomplished it. Though the hook was not large it had caught the beak firmly enough to hold longer than its appearance might have promised. The abrasion against the rocks eventually resulted in breaking off all but the tip, which remained imbedded in the horny substance of the beak. This caused Yellowhead no inconvenience; indeed, its presence there was unknown to him after the main part had been ejected.

The memory of the encounter, however, lived on, and

he eyed the vicinity of the rocks sharply for several days on the watch for stationary, wriggling fiddlers. Often he sought the surface and lay for hours, his head resting upon a piece of floating débris or held up out of the wash, staring along the line of the curving jetty and the waters about it. On several occasions he saw, some distance away, long, dark objects on the water and, once or twice, moved to investigate, he dived and swam toward them only to rise and see them no more. Each time, the fishing boats had been under way and he missed them completely.

Then one day, considerably to his own surprise, to say nothing of that of the other participants, he was successful. He lay basking in the sun this morning, when one of the dark shapes appeared far away, moved steadily toward him and, coming to within a couple of hundred yards, stopped and remained motionless. The negro fishermen had cast anchor and were baiting their lines.

Watching the stationary boat for some time, Yellowhead caught an occasional movement from the fishermen; his curiosity aroused, he decided upon closer investigation. Sinking from the surface without a ripple he swam slowly along near the bottom in the direction of his quest, coming at length to a sight which gave him pause. A short distance ahead, and about six inches or so from the bottom, were three or four little clusters of shrimp. They swung motionless, each tightly curled,

and leading up toward the surface rose a thin whitish line from every separate cluster.

Even as he watched them swaying lightly in the tide, a large blackfish appeared, swam up to one of the clusters, and grasping a shrimp turned away, only to be whirled about and drawn swiftly upward. Almost immediately, a wide-mouthed trout moved by, lunged toward another cluster and at once shot upward toward the long, dark shadow that lay upon the surface. A few moments of inactivity followed, when, descending again through the green, came the clusters to rest a foot above the bottom and sway gently in the current.

Yellowhead watched these manifestations of the power from above with a sense of uneasiness. He was inclined, for the moment, to swim away and have done with any of the strange business; but with this feeling came a sudden surge of consuming curiosity that impelled a closer look at what was above. Rising silently upward he broke the surface without a sound, just ahead of the bow of the anchored boat. He could see nothing, however, because of the swelling hull. The fishermen were grouped in the stern. So he remained motionless for a few minutes, his senses keenly alert as an occasional voice sounded close at hand.

Then, determining to see something at all costs, he swam close to the side of the boat under water, rounded

to, and appeared in all his bulk, directly under the eyes of two of the negro fishermen. A wild yell rang out and the boat rocked violently as with all the force of which he was capable Yellowhead smote the water into foam as he dived. The concerted rush of the terrified negroes to the other gunwale of the boat all but upset the small craft, but quick work on the part of the others righted it. For a moment silence reigned.

Then, "Oh, Gawd wha' da' ting bin, anyhow?" inquired one earnest seeker after truth.

One of the darkies in the stern enlightened him. "Him nuttin' but tuttle," he said rather scornfully. " 'E big, but 'e ain't gwine hu't nobody. Mekso you is 'fraid ob tuttle sum'much?" He could afford to be scornful, since the others had not noticed his involuntary start at Yellowhead's sudden appearance.

"I know 'e bin a tuttle," exclaimed one of the worst-frightened pair, "but enty you see dat ting's head? Who ebber yeddy 'bout tuttle wid' yaller head? And *him* had a yaller head, fo' true. I t'ink 'e mus' be one dese ghos' tuttle. Maybe him gwine fo' trow uh spell 'puntop we!"

The four searched the depths with staring eyes as if they momentarily expected the "ghost" turtle to rise on them once more; but as the minutes passed, the old man in the stern regained his shaken confidence.

"Humph," he grunted, "you min' yo' line an' ketch fish! Nebber fear 'bout no spell. Dat tuttle bin' as much

'fraid ob you as you is ob him!" Which was not very far from the truth.

So Yellowhead's second experience, though harmless except to his peace of mind, left him none the wiser and with his curiosity still alive. He had much to learn still.

One afternoon late in the same summer, he was resting at the surface near the beach of a resort that was a favorite among the people of the large Low Country city not far away. Beyond the line of breakers he floated, watching the beach and the waters about him with lazy interest, which was directed mainly shoreward. There was something going on there that he did not understand. He was curious about some dark objects that sped along the sands only to slow down at the inlet, describe a wide curve, and thence return to their starting point. One after another they came and went, and more and more Yellowhead wondered what they might be. Automobiles were far outside his experience, but their presence on the beach, filled with skylarking humanity, was enough to make him wonder.

He noticed that they always proceeded away from him, toward the center of the island after the turn at the inlet, and at length he swam slowly in that direction. He came at last opposite a wide pavilion where many of the queer creatures he had seen upon the jetty were coming and going between it and the sea. He saw, too, that many

of them were actually in the water, and still he ventured in, just beyond the line of breaking surf. Almost before he knew it, two or three of the swimmers bobbed up in front of him.

Catching sight of the monster so close at hand was enough to make them cry out in surprise as, with much splashing and excited yelling, they turned toward the beach. Yellowhead, considerably startled by the presence of the hitherto unseen bathers, became momentarily confused, and diving, swam parallel with the beach instead of away from it. Coming up to blow, he managed to intrude his huge bulk almost into the center of an excited crowd of young men and women who were staring about in wonder at the cries still coming from the bathers who had first sighted the turtle.

The pandemonium that ensued among the group was all that an action-hunting movie director could have desired. Shouts, screams, shrieks, and a medley of other vocal attempts clashed, merged together, and floated upward from the mass of foam created by the stampede toward the beach. Boys dragged girls; girls clutched at other girls and boys; while men and women shouted hoarsely on the outskirts and beat the water with their hands to aid in defeating the intruder.

Yellowhead, caught in the shallow surf, contributed his share of the excitement by striving, with frantic haste, to regain deep water, lifting his head now and then

to get his bearings. A very short time sufficed to clear the surf, and in the ensuing period of comparative calm he disappeared into the breakers and headed out to sea. Speculation on the beach was rife. Narrow escapes were related by the dozen, and estimates as to the size of the sea monster varied with each describer. Most of the crowd were agreed that it had been a turtle, but there were some who held out for a sea serpent with firm conviction. The yellow head of the apparition, whatever it was, seemed to be in every one's mind, and there were those present who seemed to remember having heard certain of their acquaintances say that a yellow-headed turtle had been seen at times along the coast by fishermen.

Some eight or ten young blades, members of a house-party, suggested among themselves that a turtle-hunt would not be amiss for the evening entertainment. The idea was hailed with enthusiasm by those who were approached, and arrangements were immediately begun for carrying out the plan.

Meanwhile Yellowhead, his curiosity fully satisfied, was some distance out at sea, and was again resting quietly upon the heaving surface. For the present he had seen quite enough of the beings inhabiting the land, and was content to let well enough alone. He dozed occasionally, as the afternoon wore on, and waking about sunset realized that he was hungry. Browsing about the bot-

tom, he crunched a few conchs that he found crawling about, and surprised one or two unwary crabs that fell victim to his crushing jaws. Slanting upward at length, he broke the water to see at once something which caused him keen satisfaction.

Floating along, some hundred yards away, was a little procession of what looked like fairy sail-boats. Gracefully, lightly they moved, each little craft a unit, but the whole looked like a squadron of airy, fragile ships. Closer examination would have revealed that each form consisted of an air-filled bladder about six inches long, having a raised crest extended along the top which shone with the most brilliant blues, yellows and pinks. Depending from this central body, and easily visible in the clear water, were a number of wavy, lace-like appendages, somewhat flask-shaped and adorned with long tentacles. Owing to the steady forward movement of the dainty creatures, these appendages trailed behind like magnificent streamers.

The afternoon sun, shining upon the wet, distended sides of the bladder-like bodies, brought out a varied display of ever-changing iridescence, and the whole effect of the fairy forms sailing along the smooth surface was one of rare beauty and animated grace.

To the eager Yellowhead, however, the beauty of the spectacle was as nothing. He did not know that the dainty creatures before him were Portuguese Men-of-War, but

he did know that he had once or twice in the past sampled them as food and that they were highly desirable. His capture of them had been without incident, and indeed what was there for him, in all his massive armor, to fear from things so fragile as these fairy shapes?

In the past he had been fortunate, but shortly now he was to realize that in their innocent appearance there lurked a sting. Approaching noiselessly, at an angle that coincided with the course of the intended prey, he soon intercepted them and lunged swiftly at the leader. His jaws closed full upon the man-of-war at the center of the inflated body.

Instantly the others collapsed like pricked balloons, and, drawing into compact, rounded masses, sank like lead through the clear green water. The one that had been seized by the turtle died quickly, but not before a convulsive movement had thrown the mass of trailing tentacles over the head of his destroyer, sweeping full across the turtle's wide-open eyes. A burning pain shot through Yellowhead's brain, a heavy, smarting sensation racked his eyes, as the poison from the tentacles bit its way into the tender organs.

With a startled hiss he churned the water into froth as he surged backward; he shook his head savagely as he tried to free it from the jelly-like lump of venomous tentacles. His efforts were vain until, in desperation, he shot downwards, and boring into the sandy bottom

scraped off the clinging trailers, and mounted upward. The pain in his eyes was intense, and he acted like a demented thing. Round and round he swung, lashing the water with his flippers, stretching his neck to its fullest extent, and waving his head to and fro in aimless, jerky contortions.

Descending once more he repeatedly scraped and rubbed his head into the sand, and this presently alleviated the worst of the pains. His eyes were now badly inflamed, and he had some difficulty in moving the lids. But in time, except for a continued nervous movement of his head, he became almost quiet again and, after more of the sand treatment, ascended to the surface and lay still.

A cloud settled down over his aching head and everything became obscured. Slowly, surely, darkness came upon him and, though the sun was just sinking below the horizon, for him the night had already come. His appetite had this time led him into trouble, and he could not know that his blindness would be but temporary. Indeed, he had fared better than he might have, for it is not unusual for sea-turtles to suffer for days after a rash attack upon these interesting Portuguese Men-of-War of which they seem so fond. Yellowhead had made meals on them before, but it had so happened then that none of the trailers had come into contact with his eyes; if elsewhere, it mattered little.

It was fully night, and the moon was shining down in all her silver glory when blurred and hazy sight returned to Yellowhead. For some hours he had drifted with the tide, neither knowing nor caring whither he went, and now, as returning sight made it possible, he looked about. He found himself some distance off the end of the island where he had made his uninvited visit to the surf bathers, and just opposite the inlet that divided it from the next in line.

Being rather too near a bar that shelved upwards at this point, he swam slowly shoreward, and floated at rest once more fairly at the opening of the inlet, some hundreds of yards from the beach. His eyes, though still smarting, were greatly relieved, and his sight was growing steadily clearer, though objects about him still appeared rather hazy, and distorted. Closing his eyes, he drowsed, gently rocking in the slow heave of the water.

From a wharf on the back beach of the island, a merry crowd was gathering on the deck of a cabin cruiser made fast there, and much laughter and animated conversation arose from the girls and women who had joined this hastily planned turtle-hunt. There were a full dozen young men and women on the boat, and they were looking forward to enjoying a moonlight ride even if they failed to sight their giant quarry. In the party was one

young man who, though evidently popular with the others, was not lending an enthusiastic hand with the rifles, the hastily contrived harpoons, and the coils of rope.

He stood somewhat apart from the rest while the lines were cast off, and as the launch moved down the tidal river toward the inlet he went forward to the bow. Seating himself upon the deck he gazed out over the scene before him with intense and understanding eyes. The others were laughing, and apparently quite oblivious to the beauty that surrounded them.

The night was perfect. High above, a full moon shone brightly, the little dancing wavelets of the river catching the blue radiance in scintillating points of light. To the right, the dark wooded island with its live-oaks and fringe of palmettos stood out in sharp silhouette against the sky, a gleaming grip of whiteness at its base marking the sand at the water's edge. To the left, the vast expanse of emerald marsh stretched back in green magnificence, and here and there among the gently waving stems estuaries and creeks gleamed brightly as they threaded their way toward the swamps of the low-lying but distinctly visible mainland.

All about, the night life of marsh and river was evident. The clacking cries of marsh hens rose; guttural "quocks" drifting downward from the upper air denoted the presence of night herons passing to and

from the mud flats; while faintly from the distance came the barking chorus of a wandering band of black skimmers, quartering the river on airy, fitful wings. A chuck-wills-widow called from the oaks on the island, and was answered by the high-pitched "peenck" of a nighthawk, cruising the air above the marshes for night-flying insects.

The young man on the bow sat entranced, drinking in the sights and sounds of the Low Country night with keen pleasure. Alone of the company he seemed conscious of the glory of the night, but he was not allowed to enjoy it long, for presently there came insistent hails from his companions, demanding that he join them. As the launch neared the inlet, some bethought themselves of the object of their quest, and, enjoining what quiet they could command, outlined the plan of action. They were to cruise about the inlet and a short distance out to sea, keeping a keen look-out for any sign of the turtle, and not forgetting to watch the beach, for on moonlight nights there was a chance of surprising one upon the sands.

The inlet was reached, and the bow pointed toward the open sea. They ran perhaps a mile off-shore, then put about and reached back toward the island. Comparative quiet now prevailed; every one had caught the spirit of the hunt and all eyes were watching eagerly. The engine was throttled down and made but little

noise. They had almost reached the inlet's mouth again when an exclamation broke from one of the watchers, who pointed to the right.

"Look!" he cried, "what's that?"

On the surface was a dark splotch, floating silently, the waves washing gently over it from time to time and breaking into a glimmering sheen of phosphorescent fire.

"I do believe it's a turtle," said one of the men softly. "Head over that way, but slow her down a bit more."

Approaching almost without a sound, they crept toward the stationary object, but no sooner had they all seen clearly that it was a turtle, than a startled exclamation from the quiet young man made them follow his outstretched arm with eager eyes.

From questioning eagerness, their expressions turned to doubt, to surprise, and then to incredulous wonder at what they saw coming down the inlet. With a steady onward movement that made a curling wave fall away on either side of it, came a huge, ungainly head, a head that looked like the figment of wild imagination, like the product of a nightmare. From a rounded, elevated snout, which dropped back to where a pair of eyes mounted in knob-like protuberances stood up, this head seemed all of two feet in length. Behind it appeared a ridged and armored back, with scaly, plate-like patches narrowing to a flattened, sinuously moving tail.

There was something weird and infinitely grotesque

about the approach of the swimming monster. The silence, the elfin moonlight, and the easy gliding movement of the eerie thing seemed to carry them all back to the dim past when, in the steaming swamps of some distant era, ungainly, uncouth giants rolled and wallowed in the slimy reeds; to the days of the dinosaur and mastodon; to those fateful death-traps the asphalt lakes, on whose shores giant wolves roamed and disputed with sabre-toothed tigers the right to devour the luckless monsters who wandered into the clutches of the lake's clinging, semi-liquid embrace.

Dead silence claimed the wondering watchers until—

"It cannot be an alligator," whispered one fascinated observer, "but what is it?"

"But surely it *is* an alligator," returned the quiet man who had descovered the apparition. "They sometimes come down the salt creeks to the sea, I've heard, and here is proof of it— Oh, stop him!" he burst out suddenly, as one of the excited party raised a rifle. The warning came too late. The spiteful crack rang flatly on the night air, and the oncoming alligator disappeared in a sudden boil of foam.

The events that swiftly followed were watched by the observers in breathless excitement. That night they saw the sight of a lifetime, for such events as these would seldom happen in just this extraordinary sequence.

The rifle bullet smashed its way into the huge alligator's skull. What its effect was there one cannot tell. It may have touched the small brain; it may have thrown the creature into instantaneous insanity. At any rate, the activity that followed was dictated by a maddened brain. The huge head appeared once more, in a swirl of broken water, but the creature was now leaping forward with amazing speed in a course a little to one side of the boat.

And then the head seemed to shoot clear of the water, as if the reptile in full career had struck a sand-bar. The huge jaws wide-open disclosed rows of yellowed tusks, and the distended eyes glared with insane fury as the whole body was thrown aside by some convulsion under the surface, to fall with a heavy splash in a strangely curved position. Then, almost under the long, writhing body and amid the welter of foam, appeared another head—a shorter, stockier one, with a massive beak. Across the top of it, distinctly visible for a second in the white smother, was a broad patch of brilliant yellow.

An audible gasp came from the staring party on the boat.

"By all that's wonderful," ejaculated the now excited young man on the bow, "it's the turtle, and Yellowhead, at that!"

Now Yellowhead's presence in the turmoil, though dramatic, was natural enough. Wakened to startled wonder by the report of the rifle, he had raised his head

to look about for its cause, forgetting for the moment his impaired vision. He had seen the boat as a shadowy blur upon the water near at hand and had realized that it was something that did not belong there. Diving just under the surface he struck away, but instead of going seaward he turned toward the inlet.

Blinking his eyes rapidly, he swam on, not noticing the other creature that was rapidly converging on his course, and in keeping his direction he headed straight for the maddened alligator. The latter, his head slightly elevated, and his eyes staring directly ahead, saw nothing of the turtle until his throat and chest ran full tilt upon the broad, rounded shell. Then the eruption burst. Yellowhead instinctively reared, throwing the alligator to one side, and immediately whirled about in amazed anger at the unexpected interference.

The alligator had now found something on which to vent his fury. That he was completely insane can hardly be doubted. It is not to be supposed that an alligator coming into salt water would deliberately attack a marine turtle; nor that the turtle would take the offensive. Thus the present situation was an extraordinary coincidence. Neither party was guilty, each considered the other the aggressor; and it was foreign to the nature of both, in the circumstances, to do anything but close in combat. Under the very eyes of the boat party, a battle of Titans ensued.

The scene was one never to be forgotten by the onlookers. There was the flood of radiant moonlight pouring down on the still sea, the surface marked by one boiling patch of foam, and a heavy silence except for the disturbance of the water around the thrashing forms. It was difficult at times to follow the details of the conflict, but even their occasional glimpses were sufficient to elicit grasps of amazed wonder from the spectators.

After that first convulsive heave, which had thrown the alligator on its side, Yellowhead, quick to take advantage, lunged forward and snapped fiercely at the momentarily unprotected belly of the saurian. His beak entered its flesh as a knife cuts cheese, shearing cleanly through the tough skin. A large, wedge-shaped hole appeared against the whitish background of scaly skin, and a stream of cold blood stained the frothing water. Like a flash, the wide-gaping, tooth-studded jaws of the alligator whirled upon the turtle and grasped the hinder portion of the shell in a crushing grip. But the wetness of his shell, and its rounded shape, were to his advantage, for almost as soon as the alligator's jaws closed they slipped and clashed together empty.

Immediately the tail of the 'gator appeared above the surface, arching like a huge bow. It rose high, then sank downward. Its heavy fall threw the head and foreparts of the reptile clear of the water—as a see-saw acts—and whirling in mid-air the mad beast crashed down-

ward on Yellowhead's back, bearing him under water. The great splash that rose shut out for an instant the sight of the next maneuver. Then, appearing alternately, both bodies rolled upward, then down, then up once more. The moon glistened first on the upstanding ridges of plated skin of the one, then on the smoothly rounded plates of the other. The turtle's sharp, blowing hisses were drowned out by the hollow, booming clang of the alligator's mighty jaws as they clashed together like the shutting of some huge trap. A powerful, musky smell was wafted across the water as the scent glands of the monster threw out their jets of steamy vapor, while now and again a throaty, moaning roar struggled upward from its throat, to be choked in a gurgling groan as the waters closed over its head.

Yellowhead had obtained a firm grasp on one of the forefeet of the alligator, clinging to it with bulldog tenacity while the frenzied saurian, in wild, aimless surgings, swung him to and fro in a ragged, foam-splashed arc. Its flailing tail smote the water in quick, short beats from side to side, rising high in the air, then sinking down; its nightmarish head, with eyes rolling wildly above the dripping, clashing jaws, would shoot upwards, and then—yielding to the dragging weight of Yellowhead's hold—crash sideways again into the turmoil.

Twice the heavy, plated tail came down across the turtle's back. But Yellowhead's beak met through the

'gator's foot, and the severed member was tossed upward through the red-tinted waters. Then Yellowhead, swinging downward, reached for his enemy's throat, but in the attempt, his left flipper brushed the snapping jaws, which promptly closed on it inexorably. The water about the two creatures was beaten into a cauldron of leaping waves; the two bodies writhed, twisted, lunged, and jerked in a hopeless tangle, until, with a violent wrench, Yellowhead pulled free, but with a slit and tattered flipper torn through by the alligator.

One gaping hole showed behind the turtle's eye, a ragged wound that oozed its dark stain over the patch of yellow, the latter appearing and disappearing alternately, as the waters washed it clean and the red stream again obscured it. His shearing beak, however, had not been idle, and more than one dark blotch showed on the white throat of the alligator in its frenzied plunges.

What the outcome might have been if the 'gator had not been already wounded before the battle began, no one can tell. In that case, however, there probably would have been no battle. It was plain to the watchers on the launch that the vigor of the conflict and the rapidity of movement were both decreasing steadily. An occasional flurry might for a moment mark some new development, but the end was not far off. They saw that Yellowhead had got another grip behind the stump of the alligator's severed foreleg, and that the alligator's head was sinking

downward with ever-lessening rigidity. Its long tail moved spasmodically in feeble swings. Down, ever down, the two bodies sank. The heaving waters subsided slowly in little swirling eddies. The ripples broke brightly in the moon gleam. Silence . . .

Some moments passed. Then, startlingly loud in the hushed night, came a long-drawn, sighing breath. Some fifty yards away a dark object broke the silvered surface, and a block-like head appeared. Across its top was an irregular patch of brilliant yellow, which steadily grew smaller as the head itself, preceded by a widening ripple, moved slowly seaward.

The man whose rifle had brought about the titanic struggle looked down at the weapon, still grasped in his hands, then toward the receding head in the distance; slowly shook his head, and laid the gun on the deck. Raising his eyes, he caught an approving nod from the quiet watcher on the bow, saw a satisfied smile steal across the young man's face as he once more turned his gaze toward the ocean, where the last faint gleam of yellow was disappearing into the gently heaving distance.

TAWNY-WING TRIUMPHANT

TAWNY-WING TRIUMPHANT

THOUGH it was not yet dusk, Tawny-wing was restless. She moved about on the old rafter in fidgety concern that brought a tiny, protesting hiss from the little bundle of white down on the ancient timber beside her. Tawny-wing had put her baby from her a moment before, and the mite did not like the change.

She stilled for a few minutes as she fondled it. A slanting ray of sunlight pierced a crack in the decaying wall opposite, falling full upon her as she quieted the uneasy infant. There was every indication that hunger had something to do with the barely audible complaint that came from the smudge of down, and Tawny-wing knew this very well. She had been restless even before the hiss came, and had determined to voyage forth into the late afternoon and gain several minutes on her usual time for foraging. With one last hasty, reassuring caress upon her offspring, she spread her noiseless wings, dropped downward from the beam, and swooped out through the doorless entrance of the ancient cabin.

The sun was sinking over the top of Chattimac Mountain and flooding with a mist of golden light the little lake that lay like a dark jewel in an encircling ring of hills. The green of hemlock, spruce, and balsam on the

slopes was shot through with vertical streaks of gleaming white as the birch-trees amid the evergreens caught the slanting rays, and lay reflected in the still waters below in a lattice work of palely glancing columns. It was a scene of wild beauty and serene tranquillity, this little Adirondack lake; but Tawny-wing, as she slid silently through the doorway, gave it but little heed.

On fitful wings she swooped and wheeled over the placid waters and along the wooded shore. The silence was broken now and then by the sharp snapping of her beak as she seized a wandering insect, and there was no doubt that she understood her business and knew the technique of aerial hunting to a nicety. Gauzy-winged creatures, gorgeously colored and wonderfully iridescent, gray-clad woodmice, and handsome shrews, fell a prey to her unerring swoops; but even the most beautiful of them was no finer representative of its kind than Tawny-wing was of hers.

Clothed in the softest of fluffy feathers, her general color was a tawny brown above, finely speckled with black and white that gave her a beautifully spangled appearance. Below, she was silvery white, this snowy expanse being marked with many small black dots. It was her face, however, that constituted her outstanding characteristic; somewhat heart-shaped it was—two concave white discs, separated by a sharp black beak and rimmed

about the edges with a beautiful shade of buff. In the centers of these discs were her eyes, jet-black, keen, and piercing. Her legs were booted in silky white feathers growing on the toes themselves, and capable-looking talons protruded blackly from the tips. She was an efficient, handsome bird, a brave and devoted mother. Tawny-wing was a Barn Owl.

Like all others of her rather little-known species, Tawny-wing was a lover of solitude. She had picked out the long-deserted cabin, crumbling into ruin beside the lonely mountain lake in the Adirondacks, as an ideal place to bring her young into the world. And this ancient abode, squatting at the base of a tall hemlock, had served her purpose well. Usually, Tawny-wing would have had more than one little one to care for, but a wandering rat had chanced upon the nest soon after the eggs had hatched, and though it paid for its temerity with its life when the owl returned to find it there, all the babies but one had fallen victims to its blood-lust before she returned.

The one remaining youngster had done well; he throve steadily upon his abundant food, and Tawny-wing applied herself diligently to his care.

The fact that this little owl family was resident in this section was, in itself, unusual. Tawny-wing's kind normally sought a more southern range, but she was pos-

sessed of a wandering, inquisitive disposition which had often carried her into regions where her queer-visaged species was all but unknown. She had never had cause to regret her present choice, and until the advent of the rat nothing had happened to mar the peace and quiet of the cabin and its vicinity. The hunting was easy and plentiful. What more could be asked?

Like others of the wild kindred, Tawny-wing was a good deal of a fatalist; she attended strictly to her own business; attacked with beak and talon anything that threatened her family; accepted disaster as it came. But as long as there remained one of her young to care for, she devoted herslf to the charge with a fierce intensity which only death itself could extinguish, and to which personal danger was as nothing.

The little owl had recently left the nest, situated in the old box-like guttering of the cabin close under the eaves, and had appropriated the adjacent rafter as a place of both rest and exercise. His demands upon his mother were unceasing, and an enormous amount of food was necessary to his growth and well-being. Hence, for several days, she had followed her recently acquired practice of hunting in the late afternoon as well as after dark, and this procedure had been quite without incident. Somewhat more accustomed to light than others of her tribe, Tawny-wing was fully alive to the fact that certain

dangers attended the daylight hours that did not exist after nightfall. Care for the youngster back there on the rafter was, however, paramount, and she carried on without any thought for herself.

And so she swooped and darted now, intent upon her hunting, and it was because game was plentiful and her aim all but infallible that she made a quick return to the cabin, even while the light was still golden about the pond. In view of what was happening there, it was well that she did.

In the ancient dwelling, after her departure, the stillness hung heavy and brooding. The little owl, clinging closely to the beam, searched the dim interior through glittering, half-closed eyes, its infant claws clutching the roughened surface of the timber with instinctive fervor, and only the heaving of the downy body indicating that he lived. Well did he know the art of keeping still, and moved not an inch from the spot where Tawny-wing had left him. It was due to this, and to his keen watching, that he saw the weasel as soon as that slim animal entered the cabin.

Like a thin shadow, and as silently, the lithe animal slid into the gloom of the old house, stopped with head held high while it sniffed and sniffed like a hound upon the scent. Incredibly quick, infinitely noiseless, it slipped into and out of corners; up the rickety table-leg, across

the scarred and battered top, and down again. It faded into the wrecked cupboard for a breath and appeared suddenly at the top; gave a lithe leap and landed upon the old rock chimney. Into a crevice of the stones it flashed, and came out three feet lower down; dropped to the floor, and in graceful, undulating bounds, crossed the sagging floor and glided up the wall.

With instinctive inward shrinking, the owlet watched that silent shadow of death with wide eyes and throbbing heart, but never moved a muscle. Along a neighboring rafter came the brown killer, paused to scratch a moment at a spot beneath the shingles, then stopped and sniffed the air again. A faint, unfamiliar scent had struck those delicate nostrils. Its eyes flamed greenly through the gloom, searching every crack and cranny as it strove to locate that elusive smell. Then, in dumb terror, the still watcher on the rafter saw those blazing orbs come to a steady focus upon his; saw that slim form crouch, and flash across the intervening space in a dark streak to flatten at his side with a harshly throaty snarl. True to the instinct of untold generations, the downy shape, though palpitating with fear, remained immovable.

Now the weasel had never seen an owl at rest before, and did not recognize this thing as an owl at all. The unknown is ever arresting to the wild folk, and it interested him. If this bunch of fluff was food he meant to have it. Fear was unknown to the weasel, but he stopped

a moment to investigate, and stopping, he was lost. For, at that moment, Tawny-wing darted through the doorway.

She saw the situation at a glance, saw that brown doom crouching beside her baby, saw it reach forward a tentative paw; and as she saw, she acted. With a high, wild scream, a note she seldom uttered, she launched swiftly at that crouching shape. The weasel heard and saw her coming, leaped upward with a startled snarl—too late. Full into its shoulder crashed the owl with feet extended, with the utter abandon of a wild mother fighting for her young, oblivious to all else but the consuming need for defense. Balanced as the weasel was on the lofty rafter, that sudden blow of the owl's knobbed feet was too much for him. Over he went, clawed frantically for a hold, and fell in a twisting, snarling heap to the floor beneath.

Directly below, a jagged splinter reared upward from a warped plank, and upon it the weasel descended. A thin shriek split the stillness as the needle-like point pierced the brown hide and, impaled for the moment, the animal struggled furiously as the outraged owl whirled and swooped in angry hissings about his head. With a heavy wrench, the slim fighter on the floor finally tore free, for he was held by only a pinch of skin, and in snarling fury struck madly at the gyrating shape above him. But he fought empty air, for Tawny-wing dodged the blows with ease. Then, strangely lacking in his usual

ferocity, the weasel decided upon a course of action. His side was beginning to smart painfully, and with a final snarl, he streaked across the floor and vanished among the raspberry bushes in the weed-grown cabin yard. Swooping up to the rafter at once, Tawny-wing alighted beside her youngster, and with a soft whimper of relief and trust the little form snuggled beneath her ample wing.

She stayed longer than usual on this visit; at dusk she was accustomed to be out almost continually, but the weasel's attack had left her anxious, and her baby was still nestling beside her closely, his fear not yet fully gone. But such experiences are not long remembered by the wild folk—they do not dwell on narrow escapes; and as the darkness increased the little owl grew calmer and ceased his trembling. When night closed down in earnest, Tawny-wing left the rafter once more and cruised into the gloom outside.

It was slightly less black out there and she continued her tireless patrol of the lake and shoreline, gathering varied prey. Even this darkness was not without danger, however. Eternal vigilance is necessary to the wild; no matter what the condition, the chance of life and death must always be considered. This worried Tawny-wing not at all, though she was well aware of it, and the thing was accepted with the easy but ready watchfulness that characterized her fearless spirit.

It was when her hunting was all but over for the night that the silent terror of the gloom attacked her. Intent upon her work, she had voyaged back and forth very near the trees along the shore, and weaving through the air, her body was thrown at intervals into a moving silhouette against the star gleam. It was her aerial twistings and turnings that caught the notice of another hunter of the shades. Two palely glowing eyes blazed outward from a thick hemlock on the shore; two armored feet gripped the limb in ever-tensing and relaxing alternation as the great horned owl stared fixedly at the passing and re-passing form out there in front.

Ordinarily, Tawny-wing would have been ignored by this tiger among birds. Usually his hunting was highly successful, and he seldom had occasion to attack another owl. Tonight, however, it was different: he had failed signally. The grouse and skunks of the evergreens had been unaccountably secretive, no other prey had shown itself, and an insistent, gnawing discomfort in his interior had driven the huge marauder to mark anything as food. But it was difficult for him to gauge his intended victim's flight. She was there one instant, and gone the next. Impatiently he waited, and at last his chance seemed to come.

A blundering blackbird, alarmed at some fancied danger, had left its roost among the grasses on the shore, and started on an erratic course across the lake. Tawny-

wing caught sight of it at once, and engaged it barely fifty feet away from the hemlock where the horned killer watched. As on hovering wings she maneuvered for a swoop, a dark shape left the tree behind her and, as silently as a detached portion of the night, swept without a whisper toward her.

Some inner warning, that intangible guardian which is ever on the alert among the furtive folk, came to Tawny-wing's rescue. Just as those keen talons opened over her she dropped like a stone toward the water. Apparently foreseeing these tactics, the feathered pirate of the gloom followed instantly and made a lightning grab. It was touch and go, by the narrowest sort of margin. Tawny-wing flashed aside in a swirling side-slip as one needle-pointed talon pierced her left pinion and slashed through the feathers. Thrown slightly off balance, she swerved again and, catching the air, zoomed upward at a steep angle while her huge antagonist lost her against the loom of the trees. The baffled, angry snapping of a lethal beak behind her faded into the night as the indomitable mother shot along the shoreline, kept the curve of the woods, and darted like a dusky streak toward the cabin.

Once more she entered the doorway and glided to the rafter, while her waiting youngster, unaware of how nearly he had been orphaned, snuggled to her with contented murmurings. And, in the velvety blackness there,

both mother and baby settled down to restful quiet that continued through the night.

It was on the following afternoon that Tawny-wing's youngster had his first experience in the air. For some time past, his feathers had been pushing through the down, and he was beginning to be well clothed. The little fellow had been flapping his wings, though still holding fast to the rafter, getting the feel of them in action and exercising the unused muscles. Toward sunset of this day Tawny-wing urged him from his perch, and with wavering, uncertain progress he struggled valiantly toward the doorway. Hissing encouragement, she hovered beside him, and erratically successful, the laboring voyager reached the outer air. Tiring quickly, he turned about drunkenly and, making for the nearest support, came to rest on a tall weed standing near the cabin wall. Even on this first venture the little one was to meet vicissitudes, and an investigator of a patch of jewel weed nearby was the disturber of his peace.

Darting about the flowers, poised here and there on a mist of vibrating wings, was a gorgeous hummingbird, his iridescent throat catching the rays of the setting sun like a glowing coal. The next flight of the rested youngster narrowly escaped being a head-on collision with the ruby-throat, for he blundered into the very blossom that the hummer was probing. The latter's temper, always short and on the surface, flared into instant fury at this

affront, and with a squeak of rage he darted about the little owl in a frenzy of hurried jabbings and whirring wings; a miniature tornado of trochilian wrath. Exerting himself to the utmost, the bewildered youngster zoomed upward, turned in a wide circle, and headed toward the cabin, pursued by his tiny antagonist whose efforts were as harmless as they were energetic.

Meanwhile, Tawny-wing, cruising near, saw the attack and veered toward the field of battle in a silent arc. Just as the beset youngster gained the eaves and plumped to a standstill, she shot toward the hummer with deadly intent; but the mite saw her coming and, deciding that his vengeance was complete, whirled away like a flash of light and disappeared among the nearby trees. The first flight was over; the pupil had learned that he could really fly, and much was gained. Satisfied with the result, both Tawny-wing and her baby hitched up close under the eaves, struggled inside, and gained the rafter, where she remained with him until time for her evening patrol.

Left to himself once more, the little owl resumed his silent watching of the cabin. He was almost old enough by this time to get his meals for himself, and so now made the most of being waited on. But before he got his supper, the porcupine came.

A curious scuffling sound, a soft, dry rustling, came from below, and with intent interest the owlet on the

rafter saw the weeds about the doorway tremble, sway suddenly, and a clumsy, waddling shape appeared in the half-light of the cabin. Ambling deliberately about, sniffing here and there, the porcupine circled the entire interior, poking into cracks and eventually pausing under the dilapidated table, where the grease dropped from long-forgotten meals had accumulated on the sagging floor. Here was a find indeed, and he set to work assiduously.

As darkness increased, his form was barely discernible in the gloom, but the little owl's eyes were made for such seeing, and he distinguished the animal plainly. Even more noticeable, however, was the sound of the steady working of the porcupine's jaws as he gnawed the greasy planks. The only witness to the feast sat motionless on the rafter, striving to make out just who and what the stranger was, and conscious of a disturbed wonder about its further actions. Even after Tawny-wing returned, the porcupine was still busy at his meal, and the sounds of splintering wood came monotonously from the well of darkness under the resting owls. Far into the night the feaster on the floor continued his repast, and then faded into the gloom outside as mysteriously as he had come.

As the time went by, the nights and evenings became noticeably cooler. Though warm and comfortable under the rays of the sun, the cabin grew chilly after dusk, and

each night now the youngster shivered on the border of discomfort while Tawny-wing roamed the cool shadows outside. The little fellow flew every evening now, but still tired rather soon, though delighting in his new-found powers. He returned to the cabin long before his mother had finished her hunting, and it was when he roosted there alone that he felt the difference in the air.

The chill, creeping in through crack and crevice, had made him seek again the nest in the gutter, for it was warmer there and the obstructions at either end of it kept out some of the chill and made quite a comfortable retreat. Each night the porcupine returned, the procedure now being an accepted part of the evenings, and the little owl, peering over the top-log, never failed to find interest in the quilly visitor below. He had long since ceased to fear it, and knew that here was no potential danger such as had lurked in the weasel's visit. So the crunching of boards became a familiar sound, and the inroads on the old floor grew to surprising proportions.

Tawny-wing, too, was not oblivious to the changing quality of the air. She had more than once lately had a vision of other places than this lonely mountain lake: places far away, where wide-reaching marshes and limitless woods of oak, palmetto and pine bordered slowly moving tidal rivers, and old barns stood on the banks along the southern ricefields. Yes, it was far away, but there the cotton-rats and woodmice roamed in countless

hundreds, the full moon lit vast expanses of sawgrass and bulrushes, while the air was soft and balmy both night and day. It was an infinitely inviting place, and the remembrance of it made her restless, for it was really home. They could make the journey in easy stages, resting often by the way, but always and ever they must be working south.

So she urged the youngster to longer practice flights and was more and more satisfied at his growing progress as the days went by. It would be only a little while now before both of them would fare forth together and seek the southern Low Country, and the knowledge made her glad.

It was a night or two later that the big storm came. All day the weather had been threatening; great fragments of cloud had sailed hurriedly, almost sullenly it seemed, across the little lake in the high hills; and intermittent bursts of rain had drenched the woods and pitted the surface of the lake into thousands of tiny depressions and spouting jets. The wind was variable, shifting uncertainly into all points of the compass, and the wild kindred of the mountains, feeling some impending danger, stirred not from their snug retreats. The lonely clearing and the deserted cabin seemed devoid of life.

Snugly enough, throughout the dismal day, the two owls dozed contentedly; Tawny-wing upon the rafter, and the youngster just below her in the gutter. The

unnatural dimness of the early afternoon led them to venture forth earlier than usual, but they found the hunting very poor. The air seemed swept clean of insect life, and the little woods dwellers had sought their dens under the tree roots. The young owl, too, found the growing wind a difficulty. So at last, tiring of their ill fortune, Tawny-wing convoyed him to the cabin where they settled supperless out of the angry elements. The youngster at once sought his warm box, and Tawny-wing ensconced herself beside it on the beam, while the wind roared in a deep-tongued chorus about the creaking cabin.

Blue-white lightning split the ever-growing murk outside with jagged flashes, while above the noise of the wind, crashes of thunder shook the ground in jarring concussions. The little owl was frightened by the turmoil, this first storm of his career, and crowded closely into a corner of his box. The drumming of the now incessant rain upon the ancient shingles just above his head added to his fright, and he whimpered softly, a tiny protest against the roaring elements.

It was not until the cabin shook drunkenly under a particularly heavy gust that Tawny-wing grew sensibly perturbed. The quivering of her rafter had increased to a distinct swaying and she was just on the verge of piloting her terrified offspring to another part of the building when the old hemlock in the yard yielded to the fury of the storm.

The crash came all unheralded; the swishing of the trunk and branches through the air was swallowed in the voice of the tempest; and as Tawny-wing was leaning over the top-log toward her youngster, the tree descended on the roof. There was a sickening crunch of timbers; the whole fabric of the cabin staggered as one corner collapsed completely under the smashing impact of the hemlock. Tawny-wing was hurled instantly from her perch and catapulted across the room, half-stunned but unhurt. A grimmer fate, however, overtook the youngster in the twinkling of an eye.

At the shock of the impact, the rafter jolted upward for a breath, and then was forced forward and downward by the sudden sag of the adjacent wall. Slipping over the heavy top-log, it came to an abrupt stop above the small, box-like part of the guttering in which the young owl crouched, covering it completely except for a tiny crack. That one shift of the rafter had made a prison of the nest.

The remaining walls of the cabin, built so long ago but built to last, sustained the shock and remained upright, though sadly askew and twisted, only the smashed corner evidencing the crushing blow of the uprooted tree. In the inky darkness, relieved but only to be instantly intensified by the glaring lightning, Tawny-wing darted to the rafter in desperate anxiety and searched frantically about the angle of the roof for her vanished

charge. Making little whimpering noises in her throat, she waddled about the old timber, crawling here and there, now over it, now under it; dropping to the floor to search there, and up to the roof again.

The dazed prisoner under the rafter, trembling violently and completely alone, cowered in extreme panic, the howling of the storm drowning his incessant appeals for aid. And so, unaware of each other's close proximity, the two owls endured the wildness of the night, Tawny-wing despairing and frantic, the youngster half-dead with fright and bewilderment.

The storm, in gradually decreasing intensity, passed by toward morning. The lightning flickered but fitfully as the thunder rolled away into the reverberating distance, and the wind sighed about the corners of the cabin with only a suggestion of its fury of few hours ago. Just after dawn, the rain ceased entirely, and as the noises stilled and the light grew stronger, the little owl moved with labored earnestness to the crack and sent forth his hissing appeal into the dim interior of the building. Tawny-wing, still sitting on the rafter, apathetic and dumbly resigned, was galvanized into action by the sound.

In frantic haste she made her way toward the crack and, arriving there, knew that her search was at an end. With this realization came another and less joyful reaction. Though she had found her baby, he was quite be-

yond her aid as far as any hope of liberation was concerned. Only his beak protruded from the crack, and while his mother caressed it tenderly she was possessed by a clinging dread. A thorough examination of the rafter showed her that she was powerless: her youngster was within an inch of her, touching her indeed, and yet he was a hopeless prisoner. For an hour she worked with beak and claw, struggling to enlarge the opening, but in vain. In his small and bewildered way the little one tried to help by forcing himself against the crack, but only succeeded in bruising his body against the timbers.

The day passed draggingly as Tawny-wing stirred not from her post. Whole generations of mother-love held her to the spot, and assiduously she made contact with the little beak in the crevice, and whimpered to the youngster, doing what was possible to comfort him. And, after all, she could at least feed him. As the afternoon advanced she fared forth on her hunting, returning frequently to the cabin and offering the proceeds of the chase to the voracious prisoner under the rafter. He fell into a doze at last, more comfortable than he had been for hours. Tawny-wing, her own hunger allayed, came to rest beside the crack and eased her tired body in grateful repose. Even the visit of the porcupine, who returned to his gnawing that night, did not disturb the owls. They were worn with storm and present stress, reaction claimed them, and they slept.

Several days went by with no change in the strange predicament; the youngster continued to do well enough on the food that his mother brought him, and flapped his wings in the restricted space in answer to the need of exercise. The nights grew colder, and Tawny-wing, shivering in the chill, was more exposed to its influence than was her offspring. What would she do when really cold weather came? What would happen when the mice ceased to roam about so freely; when the frost lay heavy and white upon the weeds about the doorway, and even the lake itself become a sheet of ice?

Though unable to foresee the future, Tawny-wing knew that food was becoming harder and harder to procure. She sensed some change and could see by many signs that another kind of season was descending over the old cabin like a somber pall. Still she clung to the rafter; still she fed her young; while her indomitable spirit showed no suggestion of wish to desert or to look after her own welfare. She was a mother; her offspring depended on her presence, and there was but one thing to do—she stayed.

Early one afternoon she was awakened by a coughing snort that sounded from the doorway. Instantly alert, she saw, looming in the entrance, an enormous, lumbering form whose lowered head and gleaming eyes searched the cabin with cunning scrutiny. A long-drawn

sniffing came from that mighty shape. Then, finding nothing amiss, the black bear padded through the doorway and made a systematic survey of the surroundings. Tawny-wing watched the moving bulk below her with wondering eyes; she had never seen a bear before, and the size of the animal astonished her.

It was quite evident that the newcomer found the cabin to her liking. This old bear was wise in the ways of life and had spent many years gaining her wisdom. Her infallible nose told her that there was nothing dangerous here, and she was looking for just this sort of place; a den to pass the winter in, and a snug retreat for her rolypoly babies' advent into the world. That broken place in the floor, that yawning cavity that had been the cabin cellar, looked inviting, and the débris of the smashed roof above it made a substantial covering. With no more ado, she ambled to the corner and fell to digging in the soil beneath the planks.

Tawny-wing watched her closely and realized as she looked that the huge animal was no enemy of hers. The sounds of the digging aroused the youngster, and in anxious inquiry he came to the crack to be comforted. The old owl quieted him quickly, while the bear, unaware of the little tragedy above her, continued her methodical excavations under the flooring. She worked industriously for an hour or two; then emerged from

the hole, shook the dirt from her fur in ponderous contortions, and waddled out of the cabin toward the adjacent woods.

Tawny-wing was not long in following the bear into the outer air. She was forced to roam far afield now for sufficient food, and her trips to the crack grew less frequent. Even the little prisoner felt the chill of that night; it was more insistent now, and penetrated his cell, making him whimper for the warmth of his mother's feathers.

The next afternoon the porcupine again put in an appearance, having, for some reason best known to himself, neglected the flooring the previous night. He went to work with undiminished vigor, but Tawny-wing barely noted that he was there. So much a part of the surroundings had he become that his advent caused but passing interest, and she dozed off immediately to slumber. So thoroughly was the quill pig absorbed in his meal that he did not notice a big black shadow fall across the floor some half-hour later, and not until a tremor of the planking warned him did he wheel around with a surprised grunt, to see a huge, menacing bulk on the crumbling threshold. The old bear had returned.

Her temper, usually placid enough, had been set on edge that day. Having met with petty annoyances that were not extraordinary but were distinctly ruffling, she was in an ugly humor. The sight which greeted her in

the cabin did not soothe this feeling. Far from it; it merely added fuel to the flame. Returning through the woods, she had been sure of peaceful repose here, at any rate; it was warm and comfortable under the tangle of logs in the old cellar, and rest was pleasant to contemplate. And then, in this very place of solace, squarely in front of her new-made den—who was this meddlesome and wholly unwelcome intruder, whose presence anywhere was an affront to her?

The impudent independence of porcupines she detested heartily; their clumsy movements she held in supreme disgust, but at the same time she respected the armor of these sluggish animals. She had seen hundreds in her wanderings, but had attacked only one—in her very young days, and the memory of that experience always checked her now. It had been very long ago, however, and this present disagreeable surprise was the last straw. Her anger mounted to murderous fury, and a rumbling growl issued from her massive chest. She lurched through the doorway fully intending to smash this impudent obstacle, but she still had sufficient sense to attempt it with some degree of caution.

The porcupine, for all his seeming stupidity, watched his huge adversary shrewdly. He was constantly prepared for trouble, and, feeling now quite capable of meeting any emergency, awaited further action philosophically. It was not long in coming; he saw that it be-

hooved him to do something at once, and his preparations were brief, but sinister. With a fretful, snuffling grunt he whirled about, tucked his head between his forepaws, and in a trice seemed to become twice his natural size, while his spiny tail waved nervously to and fro, a mass of quivering, flexible spears.

Tawny-wing, all eyes now, watched silently. She saw the bear lunge forward, feint swiftly, and make a quick dash to one side. For all her mighty bulk, her movements were wonderfully quick and shifting. The floor, trembling in the direction of her move, warned the porcupine of her altered position and he switched about quickly, that waving tail ever flaunting defiance. The bear stood still for a moment, then crept noiselessly to within a foot or two of that formidable brush, and sank to the floor softly. All grew quiet except for the incessant flicking of that ready tail. For some moments the situation did not change, and then, like a flash, leaped to violent activity.

The bear, noticing a slight slowing of the waving weapon in front of her, silently put out her left paw as the first movement of what she intended as a slow circle about her foe. She wished to get in front of him, and to get there without noise. She found a resting place for her paw without taking her eyes from the porcupine, and threw her weight upon the outstretched foot. The result was disastrous. The paw was resting on a rotten

THE BEAR STOOD STILL FOR A MOMENT, THEN CREPT NOISELESSLY TO WITHIN A FOOT OR TWO OF THAT FORMIDABLE BRUSH.

plank, and the ancient timber refused to bear her weight when she moved. Down it crashed. The bear lurched heavily sideways and fell full against the now rapidly waving tail. Instantly the side of her face was full of gleaming spears, and with a bawl of fury she plunged forward in reckless haste, and regaining her balance swept her other forepaw around in a huge arc.

It caught the porcupine fairly in the flank, hurling him aside like a leaf, but also adding to the bear's collection of quills by a fresh assortment in that slashing paw. This sudden accession of keen daggers drove all reason from her; with a hoarse roar she charged once more, and again the old floor gave way beneath her. Plunging into the hole, the bear turned completely over, executing a massive somersault, and brought up with a crashing impact against the cabin wall directly under Tawny-wing.

The sorely tried logs, racked by age and storm, gave way like paper under the blow of that living sledge-hammer. Bawling with pain and rage, the bear rolled through the débris in a struggling, clawing heap. Tawny-wing's rafter came bumping and thudding to the floor, jarring her from her hold as it smashed down. Leaping outward, she caught the air with her wings and swooped aside, clearing the swaying roof. The top-log that bore the box-like gutter, weakened by the breach below, slithered downward, caught on a projecting beam, and

bumped heavily to a standstill, while the dazed little prisoner it had held was bounced outward into the air.

As he fell, his wings opened instinctively and he flapped hurriedly, though so close to the ground that the tall weeds hampered him and tangled his laboring pinions. Grasping with outspread claws, he came to rest on a stout stalk and, with returning breath, hissed loudly. He was answered instantly. A swooping shape took form in the dusk, turned in a short arc, and swept swiftly toward him as Tawny-wing, who had been searching the tottering walls, came homing to that signal.

Eagerly she alighted beside him on the weed stem, uttering little murmurings of joy as she found him safe and sound. Just as she realized that he was really free and unhurt, she raised her head in a quick, lithe movement, an insistent, ringing summons stirring within her. She stared out into the gathering dusk for a moment, then turned to the happy youngster and uttered a single, sibilant hiss of quick command, springing upward as she did so in a widely climbing turn.

She hovered for a moment on silent wings while he followed, his pinions beating with a noiseless smoothness. And then, flying together, in a strong, straight course, they disappeared like wraiths into the gloom—their heads toward the south.

THE SILVER STRANGER

With a throaty snarl the mink doubled sharply back toward the wall of marsh. As it whirled aside, a keen black beak flashed downward and pierced its brown fur, the blow throwing the animal from the mud bank into the shallow edges of the tidal creek. As it struggled there for a moment, the black dagger struck once more.

The mink was both young and inexperienced, and was paying the usual penalty of indiscretion. On its first hunting trip alone through the marshes it had been much too ambitious, and now realized this. With but one purpose it headed frantically back to the green fastnesses whence it had come. It did not gain sanctuary unscathed; its lithe body was pierced in half a dozen places, and its dark coat was spotted with crimson that spread slowly over its wet fur. Once among the stems the mink disappeared like an eel, while in the roiled and muddy water at the edge of the creek a slim white bird stared after it with gleaming yellow eyes.

But the victor, too, was not without marks of the encounter. Muddy splashes stained his white feathers; a loosened primary dangled downward from one wing; his sides heaved with panting gasps. It had been a very close thing. The reckless onslaught of the mink had all

but upset the slender bird at the outset, and he had fought instantly for his very life. The sinuous neck had doubled and twisted with lightning swiftness, while the needle-pointed beak had shown the attacker that this was no frail marsh hen, but a fighter of spirit and resource. Had the mink been anything but a raw youngster, the issue would never have been in doubt for a moment, despite the bird's heroic defense; but now the rash animal had vanished, and Silver Plume stared into the marshes with almost as much surprise and relief as his adversary was feeling in its successful retreat.

Though the battle was unquestionably his, Silver Plume did not stay to enjoy the fruits of victory. One narrow escape was quite enough for the time, and hardly had the mink disappeared than broad wings wafted the bird into the air and swung him away in a sweeping curve across the tidal creek. Beating into the breeze, Silver Plume flew low over the grasses and headed toward an inlet between two barrier islands some distance away. He dropped to the sands near the back beach of one of them and again took up his fishing where he could maintain an unobstructed vigil; his nerves not yet at ease.

As he moved quickly here and there, intent upon his foraging, he made a picture of startling beauty. Against the neutral-colored sand and the blue-green water of the inlet, his plumage shone with an ethereal loveliness that

was almost unearthly. To say only that he was white would not do him justice. White he was, but of a shining purity that is unmatched among all his feathered kindred of the wild. His feathers had a sheen more striking than that of snow, for his was a living whiteness; an animated immaculateness that stamped him as a unique creature. Not a feather in his slender neck and supple body was anything but white. That his stiletto beak and long slim legs were jet-black, and that an area around the base of the beak, together with his feet, was brilliant yellow, only intensified the body's snowiness. But his crowning glory was his plumes. More than fifty he boasted, streaming from back to tail, each a delicate, fragile thing, beautifully recurved at the tip. They floated over him like a gauzy mist as the breeze stirred them, hung suspended, and drifted down again in a nimbus of shining filaments. Silver Plume was a Snowy Heron.

There was no deliberation in his method of fishing. With agile, darting dashes he leaped here and there among the shallows, for the Snowy is the most active of the herons; and the plunge of his beak was all but infallible. Shining minnows and elusive shrimp were transfixed by that capable weapon, and frequent success soon satiated the angler. As a matter of fact, Silver Plume had all but finished his morning's foraging when the mink had sneaked upon him from the marshes, and he remained at the inlet for only a half-hour or so. Taking

wing once more he flapped slowly back over the flats behind the island.

Some two miles distant, totally surrounded by the marsh and untouched by the winding creeks, was a tiny island, a "hammock" as it is called in the Low Country. Toward this spot Silver Plume winged his way. Other herons were converging thither also, and as he neared his destination the place seemed alive with birds.

A confused medley of squawkings, croaks, and cries came to him as he kept steadily onward, and then, amid the returning birds, he dropped downward to a cassina bush near the shore, and holding his wings over his back walked along a branch until he came to a roughly constructed nest of sticks beneath the flat-topped foliage of the thicket. He was joined there by his consort, and the two bent over their half-grown young in a series of weird contortions. With many twistings and turnings of their necks they allowed the youngsters to search their beaks and throats for the semi-digested fish that formed their food—to the evident satisfaction of the eager investigators.

Silver Plume's family was but one of hundreds like it on the hammock. They formed what is known in the south as a "rookery"; a large congregation of nesting herons. Sometimes these rookeries are to be found in the vast cathedral aisles and still lagoons of the cypress swamps where, in a setting of gray-green trunks, wine-

brown water and swaying moss, they make a picture of such beauty as to be one of the wonders of the country. Again they may be found on the lonely barrier islands at the very threshold of the ocean, or on a spot of land among the marshes.

Snowy herons are ever partial to salt water, and here Silver Plume had courted his mate; here they had built their home, and the pale, blue-green eggs had hatched into funny, squirmy little creatures with only a fuzzy white down sprouting from their almost naked bodies. They gave little promise of becoming the lovely visions that their parents were, but Silver Plume himself had been a nestling once, with just the same apparently hopeless appearance.

Not all of the inhabitants of this rookery were white, however; over the island, which covered perhaps three acres, fully six hundred nests were scattered. Many belonged to tri-colored Louisiana herons, others to Little Blue, and still others to Green herons. It was an animated place; ceaseless activity reigned; birds were continually coming and going; flashing colors and streaming plumes were everywhere. The low-growing cassina wore perpetual crowns of living, shifting hues, and even the few palmettos that reared their rustling, frond-like leaves above the lower growth had their share of nests placed in various crannies of the latticed trunks.

It was well into June when Silver Plume's youngsters

began to scramble about the limbs that held their rickety home. With infinite contortions of looping necks and grasping feet they maintained precarious perches amid the thicket, and gaped wonderingly at the sights and sounds that surrounded them on every side, even as scores of other youngsters were doing. Their parents were hard put to it to satisfy their enormous appetites, and were out from dawn till dusk among the marshes.

One of these ambitious little climbers was the cause of Silver Plume's second deadly conflict within a week. Just as he was returning to the nest one afternoon he alighted to witness a slight altercation between two members of his brood that ended in precipitating one of them to the ground. Clutching and grasping, the awkward bundle of beak, feathers, and feet flopped heavily to the leaf-strewn soil under the thicket, and struggled clumsily to its feet. At that moment a wandering rat, a stranger from the distant mainland, caught sight of the youngster and darted forward in quick anticipation of a feast.

With eyes gleaming and bared fangs ready, the gray-furred shape left the ground in a long, straight leap designed to end fairly on the back of the half-dazed unfortunate. Even as the rat spurned the earth in its upward bound, a white thunderbolt fell upon it. Wide wings buffeted him rudely, hurled him aside in a twisting heap; a sharp beak plunged swiftly, drew back, and

jabbed again. With a baffled snarl of rage the rat fell sideways, gained its feet, and jumped at this intruder with frothing fury. Again that deadly beak met it in the air, flashed past its face and pierced its shoulder, as Silver Plume, fighting desperately for his youngster, met the headlong charge.

A spot of crimson marked the rat's gray fur; once more its squeal of anger came, and once more it charged. By this time the fight had attracted the attention of the herons above in the thicket, and half a dozen dropped down and aided in the repulse of the marauder. Beset on every hand, smitten with a score of wounds, and bleeding profusely, the rat tried to drag itself away from the fracas it had started. Its retreat was just in time, for more birds kept coming, and the whole band pursued it to the very edge of the island where it plunged into the water and struggled off through the marsh.

Silver Plume, in the vanguard of the heron squadron, watched it go, then turned back to help his youngster, who had, however, already gained a footing in the lower branches and was climbing upward. Because he was in the depths of the thicket Silver Plume did not see a huge, dark-bodied, white-headed bird plunge downward from the sky, strike the water near the hammock with a mighty splash, and rise with a wet, bedraggled shape of grayish fur clutched in its yellow feet. The eagle veered high over the hammock and headed toward its nest on

the barrier island with the body of the rat trailing limply from its talons. The herons' vengeance was complete.

And so the days went by; each one full of activity and never-ceasing foraging. The youngsters grew apace, consuming more fish than ever, and began to flap their wings vigorously in preparation for their experiments in flight.

July came, and it was swelteringly hot on the little island in the marshes. The air was close and sultry, with a sullen heaviness that seemed to hang over the palmettos with a brooding impatience, an air of waiting for a change that never seemed to come. Toward the middle of the month, the last of the young herons had gained the use of its wings and was now circling about the island with a grace and superiority that were hard to reconcile with the helplessness a few weeks before. Bands of the birds wandered off and did not return; the colony was thinning out and scattering along the coastal islands, shifting for themselves. Silver Plume remained on the hammock, evincing an indifferent disregard of the movements of his consort and progeny. He seemed to draw within himself, fishing and resting aloof as the summer sun and moon drenched the marshes with torrid beams or silver radiance.

At last the weather changed. A fitful breeze came from the northward, blew for a day with uncertain lassitude, then swung into the east and increased slightly. For nearly three days it came steadily from that quarter,

to be followed by a day of flat calm. The next morning the east wind blew once more. Clouds that had been light became heavy, and almost obscured the skies; they banked on the southeastern horizon in ever-growing masses, and all the while the wind came stronger from the east.

Silver Plume fished that day along the inlet but found the water muddy; he winged over to the sea beach and found it worse. A strong current set along the shore, racing by in sweeping curves; the surf was heavy, falling on the sands with a sullen thunder that sounded ominous in the lulls of the wind. The latter whipped about every point of the compass now, driving the spray of the breakers across the dunes in a fine white spindrift, and tossing the palmetto fronds into a harshly complaining chorus.

Next day the wind veered back into the east and steadied into a twenty-knot gait; an even, rushing blow that increased by noon into a gale. Silver Plume hunted in the marshes, protected from the blast by the walls of growth along the creeks. It was muddy there too, however, and fishing was difficult. In the early afternoon he had some trouble in returning to the hammock, for the wind carried him far to leeward of his destination, and beating back was arduous. Some score of other herons made their way thither during the next hour and disappeared among the bushes, some squatting on the ground to escape the beating wind. Silver Plume knew

well that things were not as they should be; he sensed an impending danger, a portent of calamity, a coming cataclysm. He was right.

He had not been on the hammock for an hour before volleys of rain swept the island and rattled like hail on the palmetto fronds. The afternoon darkened rapidly as great masses of cloud hurtled overhead; huge, streaming fragments of murky vapor that seemed shreds of a gigantic canopy whipped to pieces by the wind miles away. From the direction of the barrier islands came a deep-tongued, insistent roar, a sound of growing tumult voiced by the troubled sea. The marshes bent flat under the blast; the cassina thickets swayed and creaked in a stiffly bowing phalanx as the gale played its mighty harp among the higher palms.

Suddenly, the gray half-light that was closing over land and sea was lightened in the southeastern sky. Silver Plume struggled upward through the branches and stared out over the marshes at a lurid, coppery glow spreading over the dim horizon. It was something that he had never seen before; it alarmed him immeasurably, and well it might. It was not the sunset glow he knew—it was in the wrong quarter for that, and no sunset ever glowed with the sinister portent of that lurid sky. It had no apparent center; it simply pulsed and throbbed, then stood motionless for a while, only to grow again with a creeping intensity until it reached almost to the zenith,

unaffected by the flying cloud-wrack that hurried across its quivering expanse. For perhaps half an hour it remained, then grew dim and faded out. Silver Plume was glad when it was gone.

With its going the wind leaped to increased velocity, reaching the proportions of a howling gale. Sheets of rain rushed horizontally across the hammock so mixed with spray from the agitated waters of the inlet as to give the impression that the ocean itself was hurtling through the sky. The whole scene presented an aspect of wildness that was only intensified by the early darkness; the rapidly increasing shadows of the close of an unnatural day. Night came with a rush; a night of such pitchy, impenetrable blackness as Silver Plume had never known. It was a huge sable drapery, an all but palpable curtain pressing down in a choking embrace to the cassina thickets as if to hide the torture of the sea.

Every moment the wind grew worse; the night was shot through with terrifying sounds—the crashing of branches, the sharp snaps of broken trees, the thuds of driftwood—but above all these in ruthless sovereignty was the voice of the hurricane itself. It shrieked as though a thousand demons were tearing each other to pieces in the clouds; it howled as though all the legendary powers of evil were running rampant through the murk; it yelled; it screamed; it shook the very foundations of the islands in ever-recurring tremors as mil-

lions of tons of ocean swept them from end to end.

Huge logs, débris gathered from miles of beach, were whirled together in the boiling vortex that had been the inlet. Leaping waves, ragged smothers of spray and vapor, writhed upward like groping fingers, reaching up from an invisible drowning giant in the tide. With jarring concussions the great logs crashed together over the sands, catapulting against the semi-tropical jungles and mowing down the very trees in their wild career. Falling trunks and branches mingled in inextricable confusion, the hissing combers swept from front beach to back, and over all, as ever, the screeching voice of the tempest reigned supreme.

Silver Plume's retreat, though far behind the barrier islands, was completely inundated by the sea. Water swirled madly under him as he crouched in the cassina thicket, clinging with beak and claws to the swaying branches. Time and again he was all but thrown from his hold as driftwood crashed into the bushes, sweeping many of the birds away into the roaring void of blackness. Stark terror claimed the heron, and he clung to his perch with the fierce energy of despair. The rain was a solid sheet of driving water, it was blinding in its force, terrifying in its impact, for the thicket broke it not at all. Glaring lightning blazed intermittently, crackled in huge zigzag bolts directly over the hammock, and roaring thunder no doubt followed, but not a whisper

of it came to Silver Plume—the voice of the hurricane drowned it out. And then came what surely seemed must be the end.

A whole pine tree, its limbs smashed to jagged knobs, drove over the submerged marshes from the distant islands in a wildly twisting journey of destruction. Straight toward the tiny hammock it ploughed its way; turning end for end in the cauldron of waves that flung it onward. It tore through the outer fringe of myrtles, swept unhindered across the clumps of stunted cedars and thorn saplings to crash, like a gigantic battering-ram, into the thicket of cassina. One jagged branch caught the bush to which Silver Plume was clinging and whirled it upward as a child tosses a ball. Instantly torn from it by the frightful wind, the heron was snatched aloft in the twinkling of an eye.

Up, up he whirled, an atom upon immensity, helpless, bewildered—but unhurt. It was quite impossible for his wings to open, so head over heels, end for end, he hurtled onward, struggling only to keep his breath in the dizzying speed that drove him. That he did this was little short of miraculous, but that he was not smashed by the bits of débris with which the air was filled was even more remarkable. High over the tree-tops of the mainland he was hurried, on into the blackness, ever toward the north and west. All through that fearful night he drove, as periods of unconsciousness and hazy reality

came and went. Numbed and exhausted but still free from bodily injury, he felt, toward dawn, some slackening of the wind. The gray light struggled through the clouds and the wind abated further. He was far out on the edge of the hurricane, which, now blowing inland, was losing its terrific force.

As the day came, the rain ceased and a feeble ray of sunlight filtered through the murk to fall with startling distinctness on the snowy voyager of the storm. Silver Plume was under his own power again, and found that—with some difficulty—he could keep a fairly steady course. He could see the ground below him now: scattered fields, standing in water, with clumps of woodland here and there. It was imperative that he rest, so slanting downward, he veered along the tossing tops of the trees and came to rest in a thick-leaved oak that stood beside a torrent of yellowish red water. The trees broke the force of the diminishing wind to a considerable extent, and feeling secure for the first time in many hours, the exhausted bird clutched a stout limb with rigid toes and lapsed almost immediately into a semi-stupor.

It was mid-afternoon when he awoke. The air was crystal clear, and only a moderate wind was blowing. The heron was ravenously hungry, but felt comparatively fresh after his long rest except for sore and strained muscles. He sat for some moments studying his strange surroundings, then dropped down to the shore of the

swelling river and walked along the banks. It was very muddy, too muddy to see anything, but a couple of feebly struggling fish in an eddy and a frog or two fell prey to his rapier beak. It was dark when he had finished this poor hunting and he sought the oak again, where he spent the night in uninterrupted rest.

His hunting next day was even worse; by late morning he was still hungry, dissatisfied and restless. The place was growing distasteful to him and, while his natural inclination was to fly back south, he had noted from the tree-tops that morning an indistinct, hazy loom of blue against the northern horizon. That far, faint haze seemed to draw him insistently and he determined to investigate it. Leaving these unfruitful hunting grounds, he mounted upward and swung deliberately away toward the north.

When he came to rest that afternoon the faint blue line had taken shape as a long, serrated outline of rounded domes and conical peaks, clothed in varying shades of green and soaring upward from the lowlands into a jumbled mass of purplish, fading obscurity. Silver Plume flew next day over the Blue Ridge Mountains, his eyes wide with wonder and amazement.

He even forgot his hunger as he winged ever deeper into those mysterious coves and valleys; he sailed over jutting peaks and high, sheer cliffs; he passed wide valleys, and dropped downward now and then to little

brawling streams whose waters ran noisily over many rocks and were wondrously cold and clear. He rested amid unknown trees: broad-leaved chestnuts, towering hemlocks, and low-growing rhododendrons. He traveled ever onward, pausing only to fish and frog along the streams, and in another two days came to a perfect maze of rugged peaks and finger-like valleys. It was nearing the sunset of the sixth day after the hurricane had blown him inland that Silver Plume came to the slopes of Ravenhead.

He saw below him a deep and narrow valley, from the west side of which a mighty mountain swept upward grandly to the sky; a dark, forest-fringed lake nestling at the head of this narrow cleft; and a rushing stream issuing from its lower end to go leaping over rocks in a series of shallow riffles down the slopes. The forest was a rich, dark green with the foliage of hemlock, spruce and balsam. Small natural clearings opened here and there, and remote upland pastures reached hesitatingly up the rock-bound sides of the towering mountain.

Silver Plume circled widely over the scene below and was tremendously impressed by the wildness, the brooding solitude, and transcendent clarity that pervaded it. He had come far enough; he was tiring of his long journey, and his nerves were still frayed and ragged from his recent experience. Here he would find the rest and quiet he was looking for, and there was plenty of

water to suit even his large demand for it. He set his snowy wings, planed downward over the slopes, and sailing over the hemlocks that bordered the lake dropped lightly to the shore.

Tom Hartley looked down at the puddle of feathers on the ground before him and as he looked he swore softly. It was not the bedraggled remains of what had been one of his fine hens that elicited his profanity, but certain marks that were abundantly evident on every hand. Rounded depressions they were, pressed into the soil, bordered by smaller pits arranged in semi-circles about the central dent; in a word, tracks. Innocent enough they looked, but they constituted mute proof that he had been outwitted again. Some three feet away lay a steel trap, sprung and thrown in a heap. So, as Tom Hartley looked, he cursed fluently.

Muttering evil things he stooped, picked up the trap, and turned away through the balsams. Stillness descended over the little glade on the slopes of Ravenhead, broken only by the drumming of a distant woodpecker on the long-dead limb of a forest tree.

The sunset colors were blazing over the western ridges that afternoon when a slim red form emerged from a rhododendron thicket high up on the mighty mountain. Crossing a bare, rough clearing, this shape swung easily up the slope, jumped from one boulder to another, and

finally clambered to a narrow shelf running along the cliff that overhung the clearing. Trotting along this for a few yards, it came to a deep cleft in the wall of rock and halted there. With a sniff or two it turned about several times, like a dog, and dropped to its belly, resting its head on outstretched forepaws as it stared out over the hazy distance.

With Vulpo, the old red fox of Ravenhead, this watching of the sunset was almost a rite. For years, on every favorable afternoon, he had lain at the door of his den and gazed into the shifting colors of the western sky with a peculiar fascination, a touch of peaceful interest that was utterly at variance with his vindictive, savage spirit. For although he did not look it, there was no question that Vulpo was a dangerous character. There had been a time when this was not so, but of recent years he had taken it upon himself to make free with the property of others.

There was a mountain cabin not far away where the finest hens were kept—they were easy prey and excellent eating. Together with his mate, Vulpo had embarked on a course that he knew was dangerous, for he was not ignorant of mankind. Their depredations had resulted in the loss of his mate; she had been trapped, and deservedly. But the incident, instead of deterring the fox, had made him an enemy to the man, in a matching of wits such as is sometimes employed by that savage four-

footed pariah of the north, the wolverene; and in this rôle Vulpo had been signally successful. He became a distinct menace to the man, and the man was Tom Hartley.

As much a product of the mountains as any furred or feathered dweller there, Tom had known no other home. Born and reared among the fastnesses of the Blue Ridge, he made a living chiefly by his chickens, eked out by building rustic furniture for the visitors in the summer resorts on the other side of Ravenhead. His fowls, however, were his pride; he raised them carefully and tended them assiduously and intelligently. And he was well repaid, for his chicken farm was patronized by dealers in distant towns.

When their numbers began to diminish through the raids of the red hunters of the slopes, he did what he could: he set traps, and in doing so he caught a thief. Tom had been very fortunate in suffering but little from predatory animals, and he felt much relieved when this one was killed, but he found that his troubles were only beginning. Other fowls disappeared. He trapped again, confidently, but more hens went and the pest remained. The pest was Vulpo.

From then on he lost fowl after fowl. His enemy showed a cunning ability that at first roused the man's grudging admiration, but this feeling was soon overcome by a consuming desire to rid the country of the

master thief. Indeed it was imperative that he do so, for his losses were becoming serious. After careful trapping that availed nothing, he tried poison—also in vain. He took to hunting, lying in wait, roaming the slopes from dawn till dusk. And still he failed. Only by penning his charges in a secure enclosure at night could he keep them, and even during the daylight hours, when they were out for exercise, he suffered the humiliation of high-handed robberies almost under his eyes. He had seen the fox on several occasions—only a glimpse, it is true—but he knew his enemy by the broad white splash across its shoulders, a touch of albinism that was the badge of this consummate robber.

Tom grew bitter and morose as he continued his seemingly hopeless fight against the fates whose able tool so malignantly defied him. As he strode homeward that afternoon with the empty trap across his shoulder he felt like giving up. He had thought of this last setting as one that must surely bring results and had spent hours in preparing it. His reward had been a puddle of feathers and some footmarks. As dusk came on he entered the cabin despondent, and resolved that tomorrow he would hunt once more, and hunt until he dropped, or until the fox was served the punishment he merited.

Vulpo emerged from his retreat among the rocks as sunrise was flooding the valley. He gazed steadfastly

downward at the dissolving purple mists in the coves and then up at the golden light that was turning the peaks to rose and carmine. After this survey he dropped lightly down into the clearing, trotted across it and plunged into the rhododendrons. His hunting that morning was aimless and desultory. He was not very hungry and simply roamed the slopes on the chance that something unusual would develop. It did.

It was when he was skirting the edge of a glade some three hours later that he dropped suddenly to his belly and stared out under the screening bushes with a light of quick interest in his eyes. Barely fifty feet away, scratching in the short grass, was a handsome ruffed grouse. The bird was working in his direction and this was an opportunity not to be disdained. Creeping cautiously around a laurel bush Vulpo came directly in line with the busy scratcher in the soil, sank to the ground, bunched his whipcord muscles, and waited tensely.

Nearly five minutes passed, then, as the grouse lowered its head, a red streak left the bushes, and a flash of tawny fur caught the sunlight as the fox shot outward. Squarely on top of the unfortunate grouse he crashed. One quick grab of his narrow jaws, a sharp crunch, and it was over. Vulpo rose to his feet, shook himself slightly, and licked his jaws. At that moment, a clear, spanging report rang out across the clearing; he felt a burning pain shoot through his shoulder, and

his muscles threw him aside as quickly as a striking snake. He whirled, even in the air, touched the ground like thistledown, and in a moment was gone, a speeding, ghostly shape of red.

While the laurels were still trembling with his passing, Tom Hartley leaped to his feet on the opposite side of the glade with a savage imprecation on his lips, dashed his rifle to the ground, and shook a knotted fist after the invisible fox. The opportunity of a lifetime had come—and gone. It really seemed as if the animal bore a charmed life, and the man, taciturn and undemonstrative as he was, was shaken by the ill fortune that dogged his efforts. It had seemed so easy; quite impossible for him to miss. And then, just as he was about to press the trigger, with the fox standing motionless in front of him, a wandering fly had alighted on his nose. It had tickled; unconsciously he had flinched, the rifle wavered a hair's breadth, and the bullet had struck the animal's shoulder instead of smashing into its brain. Only a flesh wound when there should have been a dead fox, and the chance had almost walked into his arms! His involuntary burst of rage subsided quickly; methodically he recovered his rifle and disappeared down the balsam trail.

Vulpo came from his den that afternoon and stretched himself upon the rocks. The slanting rays fell clearly on him; on his intelligent but wickedly cunning features,

his russet coat, his black-tipped ears, and the white mark across his shoulders. With head on paws he gazed, as was his wont, into the sunset. Perhaps a quarter of an hour passed, then his eyes narrowed suddenly; his head jerked up and he rose to his haunches in amazement. With parted jaws he stared below at what was circling through the air. It was something new to him and was as strange, therefore, as it was striking. A bird undoubtedly, for it was flying, but such a bird as had never before appeared in these mountain regions. White, pure white it was, with long, black legs and yellow feet. As Vulpo stared, the wide wings set, the stranger planed downward closer to the trees and dropped behind the ones that fringed the distant lake.

The fox remained quite motionless, lost in wonder at this surprising apparition, then at last, sank down again and gazed into the sunset. Though he gave no further sign, he wondered still.

Vulpo had been the one witness of Silver Plume's coming to Ravenhead, and it was two days before he saw the heron again. The bird was fishing in the shallows some yards from shore when the fox was on his way to the den; and with a growing wonder at the antics of the stranger in the water, Vulpo had regarded him fixedly from the woods. During the next two weeks he caught occasional glimpses of the white fisherman; and the novelty wore off. He knew that this intruder was very

inoffensive, and he began to look upon the heron in the light of a possible meal. He knew nothing of such creatures, but it was a bird, and he was fond of birds.

Silver Plume, meanwhile, had been thoroughly interested in this mountain country. He had explored the valley from end to end; he had soared above the peaks and ridges and watched the vast panorama unfold beneath him with never-ceasing wonder. He found the fishing good and the frogs abundant, and for two weeks enjoyed his experience to the full. Then the air began to change, the nights took on a chill, and Silver Plume was averse to chill. During the daytime—pleasant enough in the blazing sunlight—the coolness of the night was forgotten, but little by little a slow, insistent urge crept into him. The time came when the days did not efface the memory of nights, and he was all but distinctly uncomfortable in the hours of darkness. Another country was calling him: a low, flat country far away, with areas of waving sawgrass cut by still-surfaced canals. He was a stranger here, and it had been pleasant enough for a while, but he was a stranger, and he knew it. The age-old instinct of migration was at work, and it must always win.

He would leave these upland fastnesses and go back to where he belonged; where others of his kind waded and fished among the Everglades and in the coastal country by the ocean. He missed the tang of salty

water; the south was calling, calling, and he must go.

He started that very afternoon; left the lake and journeyed down stream for some two miles or more, fishing as he went. Tonight he would depart forever, but he must be well fed beforehand. It was while he was busily engaged in the shallow riffles near the shore of a grassy meadow that Vulpo saw him again. The fox was making for the mountain, but here was the chance for which he had been waiting. The stalk was easy, and made more so by the fact that Silver Plume left the stream and came shoreward for a diet of frogs along the bank. It seemed that this unwary newcomer to the hills was very stupid.

Vulpo sank lower into the grass; he was already invisible. Still the heron came. A frog leaped up ahead of him and shot toward a pile of rocks some ten feet from the water's edge. Silver Plume darted in pursuit and caught the luckless jumper as it reached the rocks; seized it in his beak and thrashed it against the ground, turning his back toward the grass-grown meadow as he did so. At that moment Vulpo sprang.

Something besides the protection of eyes, ears, and nose comes sometimes to the children of the wild in their extremity; not always, it is true, but that it sometimes does is beyond question. It is like the "sixth sense" that comes to human beings, a subtle, inner danger signal that sounds an imperative warning. It came to Silver

Plume that afternoon beside the mountain stream. Though the fox made no sound in springing, the heron suddenly wheeled about and saw the red doom in the air above him.

What he did was purely automatic; he had no time for plan of action or escape. Instinct guided him, instinct drove him, and he obeyed. Squatting slightly backward, he drew in his narrow head, braced tensely and, as the fox came down with outspread paws, Silver Plume leaped upward and struck out with all the power of his sinewy neck. No bullet ever hit a bull's-eye fairer; that stilletto beak, thrust forth in desperation, struck squarely in the center of Vulpo's left eye, slid cleanly through it, and pierced the brain.

Down crashed the fox as if he had been pole-axed, and dragging the heron with him he rolled over on his side. One long shudder rippled over the red fur like an undulating wave; a hind leg twitched convulsively once or twice, and that was all.

For a long moment absolute stillness reigned. Then Silver Plume struggled to his feet, trembling violently, in a strained and awkward posture. He jerked his head savagely, paused, and jerked again, still in that strangely crouching pose. Once more he gave a violent tug and fell to beating the air with his wings. He could not move. In the very moment of victory the blow that had been his salvation proved a trap—he was fastened inextricably

to his adversary. In the fury of his thrust the beak had wedged tightly in the eye-socket of the fox and was held there as by a vise.

For a moment or two the heron did not realize his desperate plight. Then when his initial efforts proved of no avail, he lost his head. In wild contortions he sprang, jerked, and twisted in a frantic endeavor to loose the beak, all but dislocating his neck by the violence of his plunges. Then, desisting from sheer exhaustion, he sank downward, panting and terrified, his sides heaving convulsively. With returning strength he fought once more, and again he failed. Not only was he trapped, but he was deprived of his only weapon and night was coming on. What dangers did it hold?

How infinitely far away now was that alluring southern country! How inviting the inaudible roar of the surf along his beloved beaches! This wild upland country had brought him low as if to avenge the death of one of its own greatest killers. Once more he leaped to activity, and fought, strained, and tore the ground with raking feet. Once more he failed. Night came.

The first few hours of darkness were a black void full of palpitating fear and struggle. Long before dawn, however, he lay still and quiet, dumbly resigned and waiting for the end. Nothing came to that strange pair by the stream; no gleam of eyes pierced the blackness along the shore. The stillness lay heavy and profound

beneath the stars that twinkled in the coldly purple sky, and only one sound split the quiet night, when the far-off, quavering scream of a hunting wildcat drifted thinly down from Ravenhead.

Tom Hartley left his cabin shortly after dawn and walked through the pasture to the creek. He wanted some fish for breakfast and he knew just where to go for them. He was far from being in a tranquil state of mind but one must eat whatever comes. It gave promise of being a beautiful day. The air was wonderfully clear and carried a tang of autumn in its breath; but his mood did not match the weather. He cast slowly along the rocky riffles, and spent some time at his favorite pool. His tackle was far from elaborate, but it was efficient, and presently he had what he wanted.

As he was reeling in his line after the last cast, the insistent chattering cry of a red squirrel or mountain "boomer" came from around the bend of the stream ahead. Tom knew that the little animal had not seen him, but that it saw something was patent, and with idle curiosity the man stepped around the bushes to investigate. No sooner had he done so than he stopped still and stared down the shoreline with eyes that bulged in amazement.

He raised his hand and brushed it across his brow as wonder gripped him hard. Twenty yards away, still and quiet, sprawled into a limp red heap, was the body of a fox; while at its head, motionless as the animal, was a

shape half hidden by the grass—a white and shining patch, like early snow.

Even as he saw it Tom knew that the fox was dead, and with the conviction came a fierce exultation; a springing hope that made him start forward eagerly. Before he reached the spot he saw a broad white mark across the body before him, and he all but shouted aloud. And then an astounding thing happened. That white shape at the animal's head stirred slightly, then struggled upward on slim black legs, and lifted a pair of snowy wings.

The mountain man stopped once more, his jaw sagging in the extremity of surprise. In another moment he came slowly forward and stood over the two forms in the grass; his eyes, trained in woodland lore, sweeping over the trampled soil, the crushed grasses, and the tracks along the shore. He saw the battered body of a frog lying nearby, and a long depression in the grass some eight feet away. He read these signs as though they had been print; he could all but visualize the scene that had been enacted there. At last he found his voice, and his first words were addressed to the limp red form that had caused him such constant loss.

"Ye blame' red devil," he grated harshly, "ye got whut was comin' to ye good an' proper. Right plum' through the eye, by gum, an' inter yo're schemin' brain!"

At the sound of his voice Silver Plume flapped heavily and jerked his head once more with that same hopeless

energy. Tom stared at him with eyes that held awed wonder and undisguised admiration. Again he spoke, this time to the heron.

"I dunno who ye air, or whar ye've come from," he said slowly, "but I shore ain't bein' pertic'lar. Ye've holped me more than ary bird o' ary kind ever holped a man, an' I'd be a plum' skunk ef I didn't do my part by ye!"

He bent downward and grasped the slender black beak with his right hand, bracing his left against the head of the fox. With a quick, sure pull, he freed it and stood erect with the trembling bird in his arms. Running his hand almost reverently over the shining feathers he spoke once more.

"Thar ye are, ye silver stranger," he said. "Ef ary bird ever earned well o' man, ye've done it. No matter whar ye go ye'll hev Tom Hartley's everlastin' thanks. So long!"

He tossed the heron lightly upward; Silver Plume caught the air with his wings and whirled about in a steeply climbing turn over the clearing and the stream, then straightened out down the valley. Steadily he grew smaller as the watching man stared after him with admiring eyes. His receding form merged gently into the far-flung distance, and just as it faded out completely there came a single silvery gleam against the golden glow of the sunrise—a momentary flicker—and he was gone.

THE DEVIL ANGEL

Pierre Durand stepped inside the cabin, leaving the snow-charged air outside with a heavy sigh of relief. No sooner had he crossed the threshold than he stiffened, and a smothered exclamation broke from him. A heavy thump had sounded from one corner, then a soft, slithering movement as if a body had moved quickly, a pair of blazing eyes glared through the gloom, there came a throaty snarl, and the eyes disappeared like a snuffed candle.

Fumbling in his pocket, the trapper drew out his matchbox, as a continuous scratching sound came from the direction of the fireplace. The match flared brightly and, holding it above his head, Pierre stared questioningly before him. As he looked, he whistled softly in amazed surprise and, stepping hurriedly to the table, lit a candle and surveyed the scene in detail. Even as he looked, a heavy thud sounded on the roof. With a muttered curse the man snatched up his rifle and darted out into the dusk, but before rounding the corner of the cabin realized the impossibility of even catching a glimpse of what he sought. He turned and re-entered the cabin slamming the door against the swirling flakes.

In a corner near the big fireplace stood a crude cup-

board; the roughly hinged door swung wide open, while on the shelf before it was an overturned sack of flour, from which even yet a diminishing white stream was falling in a conical mound on the floor beneath. A much-chewed slab of bacon lay a foot or so to one side, an open coffee can, flattened, scratched and battered, distributed its brown contents at the base of the floor pile, while a bag of beans leaning against the cupboard gave every indication of having been slashed with knives.

From the pile of flour the man's eyes followed a double row of distinct footmarks straight to the fireplace, where they lost themselves among the cold ashes. The visitor's route was outlined before him. Pierre passed a hand across his forehead and, despite the frigid air, it came away damp with perspiration. He sat down heavily, with the expression he always used under strong excitement.

"Name of a pipe!" he said tensely, "one more hour an' I'd hev been cleaned out, with the Post five days' hard travel away!"

He stared at the partial disarrangement of his culinary department for a full five minutes, then rose and cheerfully began to set things right. Turning, when the task was complete, he addressed the flour-defined tracks on the floor.

"Old devil!" he said distinctly. "I've seen your marks before, an' it ain't likely I'll forget your visitin' card

this time. I hev to thank ye, though, fer not comin' sooner, an' now I'm ready fer ye." He shook a clenched fist at the silent, tell-tale marks. "It's you an' me," he muttered softly, "an' I mean to win—d'ye hear that, ye devil o' the woods? I mean to win, an' I'll get ye, so help me Christopher!"

Meanwhile, the object of Pierre's rancor was engaged in putting what he considered a safe distance between himself and the scene of his recent depredations. He had been on the verge of a very good time, but now—he breasted the drifts savagely and plodded onward through the dusk in a thoroughly dissatisfied frame of mind, and —what was more important—hungry.

His looks were in keeping with his temper. His best friend, had he possessed such, would never have considered him prepossessing. Short and stocky, of an immensely muscular build, he was clothed in shaggy brown fur; his small, malevolent eyes were glittering black; and from the middle of his body, widening on the flanks and joining over the basal portion of his bushy tail, ran a yellowish-white band. The fur darkened toward the end of his paws, where it became black, in vivid contrast to the ivory-white claws that gleamed in sinister readiness from their sable covering. No, he was not pleasant-looking, but he was very capable, and withal very much calculated to inspire respect.

Though Lucifer, the wolverine, did not hear the dec-

laration of war proclaimed in the cabin, it was unnecessary that he should. War whether with man, beast, or bird made but little difference to him, he cared nothing for threats and little for deeds. For since he had been a suckling cub he had lived a pariah, an Ishmaelite, among the dwellers of the north, cordially hated and carefully avoided. Every man's hand was against him, while, by the same token, his diabolical cunning, amazing strength, and tireless perseverance were arrayed against every living thing, and in this desperate situation he found a savage joy.

It was a spirit of malicious mischief slightly tinctured with hunger that had prompted Lucifer to enter the trapper's cabin that evening. The man he knew well, but for some reason had up to this time avoided him. Then, with the sudden, inexplicable caprice so characteristic of his kind, he had wandered to the clearing, found the man absent, and entered the cabin by the simple expedient of descending the chimney. That the man should return was only natural, but it had interfered with a very delectable evening, and had caused Lucifer's undignified and hurried departure. It was an act of war.

Lucifer realized that his days of peace were over. It was well within his power to actually drive the man away, and he knew it. This cannot be said for any of the wild kindred except the wolverene. True, his method of attack was indirect, but it was none the less effective.

The winter darkness increased, and Lucifer, head down, plodded methodically onward under the thick spruces, indifferent to the shadows. Some few miles from the cabin a huge windfall near the banks of a frozen stream loomed ahead of him. Skirting one edge of the tangle, he dodged into a black crevice, wormed his way into the heart of the tumbled mass, and crept into a hollow of the fallen tree. Here, in a slightly rounded depression scantily lined with spruce twigs, he curled up in a shaggy ball and lapsed into slumber.

It was broad daylight when he woke. Crawling out into the open, he shook himself vigorously, passed his forepaws over his face, and ambled off among the spruces. For a short distance he traveled the trail of the night before, then turned aside and entered a thicker belt of forest. Using his nose industriously, Lucifer eventually gathered his reward. He stopped, sniffed sharply, peered and deliberated; then, his direction settled, set off briskly under the trees.

In a few moments he came suddenly upon a rough, pen-like structure that seemed to afford him inordinate pleasure. As he rounded one corner of it, the cause of his satisfaction was apparent enough. Lying just within the small enclosure, its back broken by a heavy log, was a beautiful marten. Lucifer had found Pierre's trap line. Growling in savage satisfaction, the shaggy marauder jerked the log easily from the limp form and, hauling

the latter clear, devoured the entire carcass. He then turned his attention toward the deadfall, and proceeded with methodical thoroughness to dismantle it.

The comparatively frail walls he disposed of quickly, then attacked the corner posts and uprooted them entire, carrying each one some distance away in different directions, and burying them beneath the snow. The trigger stick he broke completely. The heavy drop-log he hauled into the forest, but left it unburied. When he had finished, nothing remained but a bloody spot on the trampled snow. Making a final contemptuous, characteristic gesture toward his work, he departed. At the end of another mile he found the second deadfall of the line, and with this his procedure was identical except that he devoured only about a third of the marten caught in it. The remainder of the body he carried into the woods and cached it carefully, returning to the trap and destroying it. On he went once more, and desisted only when five deadfalls had been wiped out of existence. Only the first two contained game; the rest he robbed of their bait and destroyed. Tiring of his round of labor late in the afternoon, he made his way back to the windfall.

On the following morning, Pierre started on his six-day round of the trap line. He had many to visit, and like all good trappers, made the trip as often as possible. He swung easily along, with mounting spirits, his snow-

shoes giving out little squeaky crunchings on the dry snow. When he arrived at the first deadfall and was greeted by the silent devastation, his high spirits suffered a quick descent. He gazed at the spot with conflicting emotions, among which anger predominated.

There was no possible doubt of the cause of the destruction. The footprints of the marauder were numerous and distinct, while the sanguinary stain upon the snow bespoke a ruined pelt. Wasting no time in idle recrimination, Pierre set to work with vigor and erected the enclosure once more. He set the log and baited it, and with considerable misgivings journeyed to the next, where, of course, a like condition met him. He repeated his rebuilding, his anger steadily higher. By the time he had reached the fifth trap he was almost incoherent with rage, and swore dire vengeance upon the wolverene with every breath. It was late when the sixth came to view, and he was both surprised and relieved when he saw that it was untouched. Some slight compensation awaited him here, for the deadfall held a marten.

Not waiting to skin it, he rebaited the trap and went quickly on, to camp that night in a spruce thicket. He was far behind his regular schedule, but the next day's results were much more heartening; he found no traps demolished, and a fair catch of fur. But though his luck was a little better and he completed his round quickly,

his resolve to do away with his thieving neighbor was not a whit abated.

Lucifer, after a sound night's rest, proceeded to his visiting of the trap line just after sunrise, some time after Pierre had left the cabin. Wandering back to the first deadfall he found the evidence of the trapper's repairs, and though it held nothing but the meager bait, the wolverene quickly undid all the man had accomplished. On this day he methodically visited every deadfall on the line, being about two days behind Pierre when the latter had completed the trip. Many of the traps held martens, and systematically, thoroughly and maliciously, Lucifer either ate or hid the catch, breaking up the traps and concealing the materials. The line was ruined.

Pierre's next trip revealed one fresh calamity after another. He realized how futile had been his early hopes that the wolverene would not discover the entire lay-out, and indeed he knew that unless he killed the animal quickly, his trapping was over for the season. He had heard much and personally knew much of the ways of these indefatigable robbers who, once a line was found, would not stop until a bullet or a trap ended their nefarious lives. Pierre dropped everything else and bent his energies to the elimination of the thief.

His first move was to repair the two deadfalls nearest the cabin, as a blind; then, in a spruce thicket near the

third he built an extra heavy enclosure, with infinite care concealing a steel trap directly in the opening and baiting it with two grouse heads. Light earth and snow were sprinkled over the set, and all traces of his work removed. About the vicinity he deposited an efficacious lure in the form of castoreum, sprinkling the odorous mixture liberally.

Letting a day and a night pass, he set out early the following morning, passing the first two deadfalls on the way. Both he found quite wrecked, and though he had expected this it was stern proof that the fight had become a definite struggle for the rights to the country.

Walking grimly on, he arrived at the scene of his labors and stared about him with a sudden surge of exaltation. The ground where the steel trap had been was trampled and bloody, and the trap itself was missing. A glance at the deadfall showed it ruined, as if a tornado had been at work. Detailed examination of the spot gave his spirits a check. True, the trap was gone, but the telltale story in the snow showed that it had not departed in the way the trapper would have liked—that is, on the foot of the wolverene. An almost obliterated line of hare tracks led directly to where the trap had lain, while bits of chewed-up fur and other unmistakable signs showed that the unfortunate animal had blundered into the trap and had, in turn, been devoured by something else and the trap removed.

As for the culprit, his tracks and signs were everywhere. The cunning beast had not been fooled at all. He had torn up the deadfall, eaten the rabbit, and borne the trap to unknown parts. Pierre, enraged beyond measure, immediately took up the trail in the hope of recovering his lost property. After a mile of steady walking he came to the edge of an ice-covered lake and saw that the trail led out across it. Proceeding onward, he reached the other shore, found that the animal had twisted and turned among the trees in a winding, erratic course. Unravelling the trail, Pierre plodded on. Some half a mile further, he came suddenly upon a hole in the snow, roughly filled in, but digging into it found nothing. Evidently the spot had not suited the thief.

About a hundred yards away, however, he stumbled across a neatly made, circular mound about a foot in height, and with one of his snowshoes he dug steadily until it struck against a hard object, which he drew out. It was his trap, and in the tightly clutching jaws were the toes of a big rabbit. Pierre sat down upon a log and stared at the trap with anger, apprehension, and doubt struggling for mastery in his mind. That the wolverene had gone to such infinite pains augured either an instinctive impulse to hide prey, or a far more reasoning and acute foresight that led him to dispose of something that he considered dangerous to his safety.

The man reviewed all the marvelous tales he had

heard of the devilish ingenuity of these strange animals; not only of their skill in evading traps, but also of their uncanny ability to do away with them. Some of the tales he had scouted as impossible and fantastic; he said they were exaggerated—as perhaps they were, because the malignant, calculating methods sometimes used seemed almost beyond the power of an animal brain. And yet—He remembered that the wolverene is the only mammal that wilfully and maliciously destroys property for which it has not the slightest use. Pierre realized, as he viewed this evidence of cunning, that the whole truth about wolverenes was yet to be learned, and that he could doubtless furnish additional chapters when his present campaign was over. At length, with a muttered curse upon his absent enemy, he arose, picked up the trap, and began the long tramp to the cabin.

Except for eating and sleeping, he devoted his entire time and efforts to the extermination of Lucifer. For three weeks he labored and wrought to the utmost of his ability, which was by no means small. His efforts failed signally. One expedient remained, and that was the gun-trap. He had not used it heretofore because he had but one extra weapon, an old trade musket; moreover, he had had sufficient faith in other means. But now he had acquired an almost superstitious fear of his antagonist, and hated to lay his musket open to destruction. But his hand was forced.

Careful in the selection of his locality, he marked a place that the wolverene passed frequently. This was a rather low run, between the banks of a small brook rimmed about by thick woods. At the top of the bank on the left side of the creek, he placed the gun on two upright crotched sticks, cut a small pine and arranged it so as to cover the weapon completely and shut off any view of it. In front of the muzzle, and in plain view of the trail below, he placed half a hare on a slight support with a cord running back from it to the trigger of the gun. Any pull at the bait was sufficient to discharge the piece and the bullet must necessarily strike the intruder at point-blank range. Covering his footprints, he left the result to chance—and to Lucifer.

It was late the next afternoon when the wolverene found the trump card in Pierre's hand of tricks. Ambling along the snowy trail, he picked out the tempting bait at once. Scrambling up the bank he made a thorough olfactory survey of the hare, and as he did so, the cord caught his attention. He followed it back to the trigger of the gun, touching nothing in his examination. The pine tree hampered his movements considerably, and in petulant anger he heaved it aside, leaving the musket fully exposed.

What thoughts ranged through that savage brain none can say; whether he associated the cord with the idea of a trap will never be known. At any rate, after a careful

look he walked up to the gun behind the muzzle, and taking the cord in his teeth, chewed it cleanly in half. Stepping around to the front again, he pulled the hare from its support, squatted in the snow and devoured the last morsel. Then he set off toward his windfall, entered it and slept the sleep of the unjust.

To the eager trapper who visited the set next day, the story was as plain as if he had seen it acted. Almost disbelieving the evidence of his eyes, he stared at his frustrated plan in bewildered amazement. Mechanically he furnished another piece of bait, and knotted the cord again to the trigger. Surely the second time must succeed. He was wrong. His next visit showed that the wolverene had returned and duplicated his feat, but this time had cut the cord behind the knotted portion, as though reasoning that the very existence of the connection might be some additional snare. Pierre's spirits, at this extraordinary feat of fiendish cleverness, dropped to zero. Mixed with his baffled rage was an uneasy feeling of admiration for the shaggy animal that so repeatedly bested him.

"They call ye 'Devil o' the Woods,' ye rascal!" he muttered, "an' I'm beginnin' to think it ain't nothin' but the straight truth."

Shaking his head, he was on the point of taking up the gun when he stopped short and gazed at it intently. "I'll leave it one more time," he said aloud. "One more time,

an' if ye cut it behind the second knot, I'm done." Tying it securely, he sacrificed another rabbit and departed with considerable doubt as to the outcome.

As he sat by his fire that night Pierre reviewed the whole of his campaign against the wolverene. An idea began to take shape in his mind. Rising, he got out all the traps he had, finding but five—three small ones, one wolf trap and one medium-sized bear trap. With these ranged on the floor, he dropped his head in his hands and pondered. Half an hour later he arose, his face shining.

"I ain't done after all," he said happily. "Name of a Pipe, this is the best yet."

The next morning, with all the traps, his rifle, hatchet, a light lunch and a slab of bacon, he left the cabin. He went to the spot where his trap line had started, and set to work. First, he made by far the stoutest deadfall he had yet built, but omitted the essential trap-log purposely. The pen complete, he turned his attention to the traps. He put three in front of the deadfall in an oblique line, and, leaving the setting of them until later, entered the enclosure with the other two. These set inside, were really to be the mainstay of his scheme, and the placing of them was done with great care. Sprinkled with castoreum the wolf trap was set in the right-hand corner to the rear. He then affixed a piece of wire to the slab of bacon and suspended it from the rafters in the center of

the pen. He counted on the wolverene's noticing the absence of a drop-log, and knew he would investigate every crevice of the pen to see what it was all about.

Then he manipulated the bear trap, his heaviest and most formidable ally. Though not of the largest size, it was a fearful contrivance, the iron jaws seeming to leer at him with cold malignancy as he worked. The spring was very strong but it had an undoubted flaw, and he had discarded the trap for such animals as bear. Making a slight depression in the ground to take the trap, he bent over it to set the springs. He was unable to move them by hand pressure, and reached into his pack for the jack-screw that forced down the jaws. Just as the trigger caught he gave a final turn to ease the spring; there was a sharp snap, and the little tool broke cleanly in half. The trigger held the jar, however, and tossing the broken pieces into the brush, Pierre shoved the trap gently into the depression, and reached for the castoreum bottle.

The unexpected often happens quickly, and a mere step can precipitate disaster. The bottle was a little out of reach, and without shifting his foothold Pierre reached for it in a long stretch. A chunk of snow, blocking his right foot, suddenly went to pieces under the strain, and his foot shot outward and struck fairly on the pan of the trap. The jaws leaped together in a sodden, crushing impact about his booted leg midway between the knee and

the ankle. A hoarse, terrible cry broke from him, his body tautened like a vibrating rope, and he leaped upward only to fall in a kicking, writhing heap.

The first spasmodic fit of struggling passed quickly. After that startled outcry he was silent. He sat upright, his legs outstretched in front, his back against the log wall, and his mind working at racing speed. Not that it did not require an almost superhuman effect to control his faculties and movements. He fought to keep down the wildest exertions, he wanted to kick and shout, to swing the iron clamp about his leg with smashing impact on the ground. He wanted to *do* something. But the more he forced himself to think, the more rapidly did he realize that there was absolutely nothing to be done.

His mind resolutely fought this idea down, it leaped from one insane project to another, he trembled suddenly like a leaf, and an involuntary groan came from his lips. Leaning as far forward as possible, he examined minutely the devilish engine that had him in its grip. He felt no great pain now, though there had been considerable at first; but a sort of numbness had come over his leg, as if it had gone to sleep. He felt it carefully from knee to ankle. The bone was not broken—he was sure of that—and a surge of thankfulness swept over him, only to be followed by the hopeless feeling that it made little difference whether it was broken or not. That it was not broken was the fault of the weakened

spring, and this, together with his boot, socks and underclothing, had saved the bone.

He leaned down and, grasping the springs, drew a deep breath, and bore downward with every ounce of strength. There was an almost imperceptible give, and his heart beat high with hope as he strained until beads of moisture broke out on his face. He could make no further progress. A row of black specks danced before his eyes, he loosed his hold, and sank backward—beaten. The spring was too strong, and he suffered the inevitable reaction. He had done something, had done his utmost, and had failed. He knew that he could do no more.

Suddenly a queer gurgle sounded in his throat. He refused to accept the dread truth. He jumped to feverish activity, attacked the trap savagely, beating it with his fists and kicking it with his free foot. He cursed it, swung the heavy thing to and fro with insane strength, until it brought him up with agonizing pain. Then he laughed: a high-pitched peal of mirthless sound, which held in it a note of madness. Somehow, that horrible laugh brought him to his senses. He quieted at once, sat straight again and collected his reeling thoughts. And then two ideas leaped into his brain. The jack-screw, of course—fool that he was to forget it! He whirled about, and the other thought struck him like a blow. He remembered the sharp, metallic snap, he even followed the flight of the broken pieces from the door when he had thrown them

aside. The thought finished him. He fell backward at full length, his eyes closed.

He awoke as sharp, tingling pains shot up and down his leg, and they galvanized him into another vain attempt to force the spring with his hands. He was panting now, in short, staccato breaths that whistled between his dry lips. Queer fancies ran through his brain. His eyes fell upon the pack; was there anything in it that could help? He knew there was not, but he pulled it toward him and searched feverishly. He drew out the lunch and sat staring at with a queer, intent expression. Could he use bread for a jack-screw? No, it was too soft—it might crumble or snap. He wondered whether it would sound like the jack-screw when it broke. He laughed again, and with the sound a merciful veil descended over his wandering brain, everything went black, and he fell in a strange, twisted heap against the logs.

Dusk was falling when he regained consciousness. His mind was clear and the pain had settled into a dull throbbing. He saw the lunch again, and reaching for it, began to eat, but it choked him and he was suddenly consumed with thirst. He ate a few handfuls of snow, which eased him slightly. Another thing forced itself upon his tortured brain: he was conscious of an overpowering smell of castoreum. The bottle had struck a rock when he had dropped it, and the choking odor pervaded the entire vicinity. It sickened him, and an ir-

resistible desire to get outside of the pen seized him. How he managed it he never knew—it was a marvel that he moved. But finally he made it, falling around the corner, under a thick spruce branch that brushed the deadfall, where he lay invisible to outside view.

As the cold stars came out, despair gripped him by the throat. Night closed down, and from the gloom under the branch rose a high, thin cry that echoed through the snowy solitudes in eerie, quavering cadence, the wail of a brain overwrought by torture. It sank to a quivering whisper while the heavy silence resumed sway over the darkening forest.

Lucifer, stirring in his dark hollow, awoke and emerged into the dawn of an overcast day. Plunging into the forest he foraged unsuccessfully for an hour, coming at length to the now familiar gun trap. The fresh bait awaited him as breakfast, and with a grunt of satisfaction, he climbed the bank, and proceeded to get it. Perhaps he had grown careless, perhaps he was too impatient; at any rate, he jostled it too roughly and even as he turned toward the rear, there came a bright flash and a sharp report, and a hot searing pain coursed through his hind quarters.

The stunning surprise and sudden pain quite upset him, and losing his balance, he rolled in a snarling, clawing heap to the trail below. Almost instantly he leaped

to his feet, for the wound was by no means fatal. It hurt, however, hurt keenly, and the inevitable result was to throw him into an unreasoning, tempestuous rage. In hot ferocity, he ascended the bank once more and attacked the gun in rending fury. Tearing it from the crotched stakes, he demolished the stock in a few moments with teeth and claws, but the barrel and lock defied his efforts. He wrestled with it and clawed it until it shone from the marks of his teeth. At length, realizing that it was beyond destruction, he finally spurned it, and in vindictive, snarling animosity devoured the bait that had cost him a gashed hindquarter. A flow of blood was his only damage, but another inch or two would have made a very different matter of the injury.

His rage, instead of abating, rather increased. The bait was but a morsel, only intensifying his clamoring appetite, and this had been his first setback in a long while. In a savage temper, ready for any sort of trouble, he flung off into the woods, ranging here and there in the effort to find something upon which to vent his feelings. Suddenly a delectable odor assailed his eager nose. Castoreum he would trace to any length, and the scent being strong, he knew it could not be far distant. Instantly he made toward it and came shortly to the newly constructed deadfall. Its fresh appearance goaded him to frenzy. Whether the castoreum smothered the man scent, or whether he was so reckless that he cared

not for it, matters little. One cannot always fathom the wherefore of a wolverene's actions. Their results speak for themselves.

Rushing toward it, he saw the traps lying outside and, spurning them aside, entered the enclosure and spied the bacon. He had already seen that there was no drop-log, but beyond ascertaining the fact that it was lacking, he did not investigate further at the time. He seized the meat savagely, and the way it swung to and fro infuriated him still further. Biting off what chunks he could manage, he bolted them voraciously and the greater part quickly disappeared, whereupon he turned his attention to the deadfall. Attacking the front left corner post, he worked as if everything depended on haste.

It was in this work of destruction that the animal's immense strength was so plainly manifested. He hurled the stout material about as though it had been small twigs; leaping at the post, he heaved, strained, and pushed with overpowering force. The log leaned under the fierce assault, swayed, and crashed outward. The heavy log that rested on it, thus relieved of its foundation, broke away, slewed around and smashed down full into the spruce bough at the side of the deadfall.

To the imprisoned trapper, the night had been one long black horror. Intervals of clearest reason had alternated with periods of wandering and insensibility. His

leg had been a numb, dead thing for a long while, but with the coming of the dawn it gave signs of fresh feeling, and a stabbing pain was what aroused him from stupor as the daylight came. He stared glassy-eyed through the screening bough for nearly an hour, and then there came, within their weary depths, a faint, quivering flicker of animation. A form had moved out there among the shadows, a shaggy, short-set figure appeared and approached the deadfall with growling rush. The man gazed at the wolverene as at a strange vision.

Here before him was the cause of all his agony, this horrible situation that was sapping his reason. He felt no hatred, however, only a numbed surprise. He watched while Lucifer spurned the traps aside, watched when he entered the deadfall, and heard the animal begin his work of demolition. Then came the collapse of the corner post, and though he did not see the top log when it fell, its crash through the bough brought a flicker of interest to his dull eyes. Then came something else.

He felt a heavy blow upon his right foot, heard a sharp, metallic cracking sound, and as if by magic, the cruel constriction about his leg melted suddenly away. He heard, too, a fresh outburst of snarls and growls from the wolverene, but of these he took no notice. He lay absolutely still, a sort of wonder creeping over him like a wave. Then, with a sudden effort, he cleared his brain, gathered his forces, and sat erect. His eyes glared

downward, and were riveted in a fixed, unbelieving stare. Across his right foot lay the butt end of the top-log and under it, gaping loosely now, were two serrated iron jaws.

His brain fought furiously to understand the miracle. There was but one explanation. The log had struck squarely across the trap spring, and the weakened metal, too strong for him, had snapped under that descending blow. The flaw had got in its work, and he was free. Still incredulous, he moved his leg. It hurt him considerably, but he found that he could move his toes. His face was uplifted in a kind of glory, he raised his arms in a single, silent gesture, while a strange expression crossed his working features, drawing them into softer, normal, more familiar lines. Slowly, unsteadily, deliberately, he rose to his feet, his strength returning rapidly. He took a limping step, swayed, caught at the branch, then took another. Again came that silent, expressive gesture of his arms.

Suddenly, the snarling of the wolverene broke in on his senses. He turned and stared into the enclosure. What he saw brought a gasp of wonder from him. There, pinned under the very log that had so wonderfully released him, lay the wolverene, his hindquarters crushed into the snow; snarling, struggling, but immovable. Another stunning surprise, and one as easily explained. In its sudden fall, the other end of the top-

log, jarred loose from its last support, had slithered inward and descended on the back of Lucifer as he was busily digging about the corner post. Its force had crushed him into the soft earth, breaking no bones, but holding the frantic beast hard and fast under its weight. He was caught at last, and in a deadfall that was not a deadfall after all.

The irony of it struck the trapper with full force, in spite of his turmoil of mind, and a grin came over his face as he watched the struggling animal. But as he looked the grin faded. He turned slowly and gazed at the smashed bear trap under the other end of the log. And as he gazed, the surrounding objects seemed to become obscured as by a heavy veil; he saw only those cruel iron jaws, seemed to see them clamped about a thin, white bone, and above them another bone that led his eyes upward to a bleached skeleton lying there, with little blades of grass pushing through the whitened framework. Slowly the sinister vision faded, the deadfall and the log again took shape, while his eyes came to a focus upon the animal pinned beneath it.

A sudden resolution tightened his lips, and his eyes shone with a sort of sympathetic glow. He hobbled into the enclosure, picked up his pack and arranged it on his shoulders. Setting his rifle against the spruce limb he turned once more to the wolverene, and for the first time, spoke aloud.

"I've called ye a devil," he said, in a strange, cracked voice. "An' I meant it. I'm here to take it back. I'm tellin' ye that I've fought ye, an' ye've won, an' that instead of a devil, I'll always believe that ye're an angel!"

Then, with a queer sound in his throat, half sob, half laugh, he stooped quickly, grasped the end of the log and with a quick heave, threw it aside. Turning, he snatched up his rifle with never a backward glance, and limped off steadily through the snow, his tall figure slowly merging into the shadows beneath the trees.

ALBA—HIS ODYSSEY

ALBA—HIS ODYSSEY

The dozing seal suddenly jerked its head upright and with startled gaze stared out over the rippling surface of the waters that lapped the ice floe. The large, mild eyes glanced uneasily here and there, but nothing was visible except a circling gull, as white as the ice itself and as silent. For perhaps two minutes the seal watched intently. Then, its quick alarm subsiding, dropped its head once more. Another minute passed. All was still. The gull disappeared, and except for the faint wash of the ripples at the edges of the ice the scene was devoid of movement.

The seal slept, and sleeping, never knew the lightning doom that smote it. A huge, glistening shape rose upward from the steel-colored water, rose at the very edge of the floe, and rearing high in an arching, silent spring, descended fairly upon the motionless form with a sodden, crashing impact. An armored paw, edged with clutching talons, crushed the sleeping animal's head against the ice, a crimson blotch in ever-widening spread spilled across the floe, and with a convulsive quiver, the tapering body stilled, the flippers moved feebly once, twice, and then sank softly downward.

Rising from the still form with a rumbling growl of

satisfaction, the dripping conqueror stood erect. With his narrow, wedge-shaped head held high, he sniffed sharply, lowered it with a quick swaying motion, and began his meal. All the movements, the appearance, and the method of attack of the newcomer denoted rulership. The onslaught had shown cunning, power and experience; his ensuing behavior was sure, deliberate, and without apparent regard for any observer while his appearance was provocative of admiration and respect. Full nine feet in length, standing four and a half feet high at the shoulder, he was clothed in a heavy coat of fur, white from head to tail, slightly tinged with the hue of old ivory. Alba was a polar bear.

Indeed, he was more than that. He seemed to typify in a striking way the very spirit of that vast, Arctic country that he ruled, for rule it he did. Strong, implacable, vested with a stern superiority, he took toll of his subjects in that land of ice and snow impartially and often, and there was none to say him nay or to dispute his monarchy.

He proceeded with his meal, enjoying the result of his successful hunting all the more perhaps because his foraging for the past day or two had met with but indifferent success. He had seen the seal from quite a distance as the sleek animal had hauled out upon the ice and flopped to rest beside the edge. He had waited until it had composed itself to sleep, then, in a clean dive, had

left his station, and vanished under water in the direction of his intended victim. The distance was long enough for him to rise once and check his bearings, and a hurried glance had shown him that all was well. He did not see the seal's momentary alarm, and when the edge of the floe had loomed through the water ahead, he had gathered his muscles, and left the surface in a tense spring. So accurately gauged was it that the attack had fallen directly upon the unsuspecting animal above. It was nearly always so. Failure rarely attended Alba's efforts, and if he went hungry at times, it was because nothing showed itself, not because of any lack of skill on his part.

His hunting grounds covered a wide stretch of territory. Along the curving, broken coastline north of Hudson Bay he roamed, sometimes journeying far from land on the pack ice, and subsisting on whatever chanced his way. It was a grim country, this domain that the white bear ruled. None of the indolent, swarming life that teems in the lazy tropics was here. It was a land of harsh severity, it harbored no weaklings and shirkers, for only the strong survived, and among the strong, Alba was strongest.

It was a time of year now, however, that was welcomed by all the northland dwellers. Spring had come, and nowhere is spring more eagerly looked for. The scanty verdure grew rapidly, little flowers nodded from

the close-growing tundra mosses, and the surface ice was melting, showing rounded heads of gray rocks on which lichens grew. The foxes were coming forth from their dens in yapping satisfaction, and hares and lemmings roamed abroad ever on the alert for their active enemies. Tiny shrews peeped from crevices in the rocks, or made sudden sallies after wavering butterflies. As Alba viewed it now, it was quite a different scene from the recent desolation that had held the land in complete subjection.

The roaring blizzards and freezing blasts from the Pole were but hazy memories, and the whole region was making the best of its brief liberation from the reign of winter. No phase of life was more in evidence than the birds. In ever-increasing numbers, squadrons of ducks, geese, and shore-birds were arriving from the south, and the estuaries, shores and tundra echoed to the clamor of their coming. Legions of gleaming snow geese settled in banked masses over the flats, and companies of their mysterious blue cousins, whose nesting grounds have only just been beheld by human eyes, announced in vociferous confusion that they were home again. Sandpipers, plovers and swans circled, wheeled and swung about the shoreline, all eager to begin their domestic duties.

It was a scene of animation, and the big white bear welcomed it with an uplift of spirit, and gloried in the swarming abundance of the birds. The long silence of

the winter night was gone, and the air rang with the call of mating life.

After he had eaten what he wanted of the seal Alba raised himself again, stood for a moment glancing over the strip of water in front, and, plunging in, made his way to the mainland. Clambering out upon the shingle, he shook himself vigorously and set off along the shore-line. Some quarter of a mile he went, and swung inland to where a jumbled mass of boulders topped a rise on the tundra. Between two of them, at the summit of the low eminence, was a crevice, not large, but dry and dim, and to this spot the white bear made his way. It could hardly be called a den, for Alba did not hibernate during the winter as the female bears did, electing to roam the snowy solitudes continuously. The crevice, however, served him both as a resting place and as a look-out station, and he usually repaired to it when weary or full fed. Climbing the little slope, he gained the summit, but not entering the dim recess, stretched himself on the rocks, the sun's light and warmth being continuous at this season of the year. His full stomach made him drowsy, and dropping his head between his paws, he rumbled comfortably deep in his throat, luxuriating in lazy satisfaction.

A tiny black and white snow-bunting, hopping about the rocks and investigating possible nesting sites, awoke the bear by its sharp little "chips." Alba opened his

eyes, and without moving, eyed the little bird with detached interest for a moment, then raised his head and stared out over the tundra. The bunting took wing in startled flight and silence reigned once more. Alba's head dropped again, and he resumed his interrupted nap, waking about an hour later. He sat up on his haunches, stretched hugely and yawned. Just as he was about to descend the rocks, he stopped short, whirled about, and listened intently, his body tense and expectant. A sound had broken the stillness.

Unfamiliar it was, one that he could not account for, and after a full two minutes of rock-like immobility, he turned about, slipped over the boulders and, gaining the tundra, glided noiselessly across an intervening clear expanse, and wormed his way through some low-growing vegetation in the direction of the disturbance. A little hill, clothed with grasses, rose before him, and the sound, intermittent but more distinct now, seemed to come from beyond it. Crouching low, the white bear crawled up the gentle slope, and creeping to a large rock lying half buried on the summit, raised his head cautiously, and looked out over a large, bowl-shaped depression, in the center of which was an animated scene.

Alba's eyes grew wide with surprise, and with satisfaction too. He had never seen such a sight before, and he gazed intently, uncertain yet as to his future actions. Almost in the center of the depression stood a round,

compact group of very shaggy, short-horned animals. With their rumps together toward the center of a circle, they faced outward with lowered heads, and among them, crowding close to their shaggy flanks, were several smaller replicas of these strange-looking creatures. The attention of this group seemed equally divided between an intensely active combat that was being staged not far away, and three grayish, skulking shapes that circled over the tundra at a respectful distance from those lowered heads.

The two combatants were similar in appearance to those that stood in formation, except that they were larger and darker and had longer and more massive horns. Drawing off from one another, they pawed the ground, shook their heads, and working themselves up to the proper pitch of excitement, charged forward and crashed together in a thudding impact that all but drove the breath from their bodies. Tight-locked, they pushed, gored, and pawed each other in frantic confusion, their horns rattling together in sharp, cracking sounds that Alba immediately recognized as those that had first attracted his notice.

He was witnessing a struggle between two old musk-ox bulls, and the sight was as interesting as it was new. Drawing away, the two retired once more, and with tossing heads and pawing feet offered mutual challenges that were mutually accepted, and closed

again in a headlong rush. One of the bulls stumbled as they met and, slipping to his knees, was immediately pounced upon by the other and bowled over on his side. At this startling development, the watching group of cows in their excitement parted their close ranks for a moment, and one of the calves, in playful impetuosity, bounced out of the ring and cavorted over the tundra. All unwittingly, it had started something.

When it was about fifty yards away from the cows, two of those skulking gray shapes flashed forward, circled the youngster and coming between it and the cows, who were as yet unconscious of its absence, drove it further afield, converging on it. Skilfully absorbed in the battle of the bulls, the group heard a sudden, bawling note of terror from the calf. Its mother wheeled about, saw the situation, and pounded heavily toward her offspring in maternal rage and anxiety. Even as she started, however, the third gray shape leaped suddenly from the grass and flashed at her throat. Caught unawares, she reared, slipped, and fell upon her side just as another high-pitched bleat from the calf gave proof of its extremity.

Struggling to her feet, the cow made a lunge at the wolf, who was hanging to the grip he had gained on the heavy mat of hair at her throat, and raising her forefoot, brought it down like a sledge-hammer on the back of the gray marauder. With a choked yelp, he dropped

away and sprang aside with a lamed shoulder. But the delay had been fatal to the calf. Just as its mother had slipped, the other two wolves had leaped upon it, and that high bleat had been its last. Tearing at the tender throat, they suddenly saw the charging cow bearing down upon them, and darting hurriedly away, they circled about and crouched warily.

The interruption had attracted the notice of the other cows, and with wide eyes and regular tread they moved toward the frantic, bereaved member of their band as she was nuzzling the body of the calf. The bulls, in a momentary cessation of hostilities, gazed uncertainly at the procession, and, not noticing the crouching wolves, were about to renew the fray when another actor suddenly appeared on the scene.

Alba, having missed no detail of the drama before him, decided that the time was ripe for interference, and rising from behind the rock he charged down the little slope with a swiftness remarkable considering his bulk. He was seen at once by the two fighters, who promptly forgot their grievances and bellowed a warning as they took to their heels. The cows wheeled about, saw that charging white form, and with one accord broke ranks, pounding across the tundra, formations forgotten in the sudden peril. Alba, however, paid no heed to their going—he was bent on other business.

His acquaintance with the queer Arctic cattle was very

limited. He had seen but little of them in his wanderings, and had never attacked them. Now, however, the feast was ready prepared, and the procedure of having to relieve the rightful owners of their spoil bothered him not at all. He did not expect to make a meal of the calf without a fight, and certainly the wolves had no idea of giving it up without resistance. They, like the oxen, had seen Alba coming, and soon found themselves alone on the field with him. Slowing his rush to a shambling trot, the bear proceeded straight toward the crouching wolves who stood between him and the calf. They did not wait for him to attack, but took the initiative themselves. Like gray streaks they left the ground in silent springs, flashing toward Alba's throat. The disabled wolf hung back, watching for a chance to close after the other two had engaged the bear.

Alba stopped short as the two sprang, squatted back, and rearing met them with a lightning blow of his armored paw, dodging quickly as he swept that formidable weapon in a swift arc. The ponderous but accurate blow caught the nearest wolf full on the side of the head, crushing bone and sinew with terrific force and hurling the gray body headlong to one side. Its doom was swift and sure. So quick was the action, so devastating in its completeness, that the wolf, in mid-air, did not reach the ground alive—it was instantly a lifeless heap. The second animal, darting under that awful

sweep but thrown off his course by Alba's dodge, whirled about, made a slashing, successful cut with his jaws, and leaped aside at once. The third wolf, despite his lame shoulder, darted in and leaped for the bear's back.

A grunting roar of pain and rage burst from Alba as he dropped quickly to all-fours. Wheeling about, he slashed at that mauling shape near his hindquarters, unable to inflict much damage, however, because of the wolf's position. The other, meanwhile, had again slashed his flank with another wicked lunge, and dodged away. With a bawl of anger the bear suddenly rolled over on the ground in a movement quick as thought, and the lame wolf, his shoulder hampering him, was pinned under the huge white body as the immense weight crushed him downward. Just as quickly, Alba regained his feet, and before the gasping animal before him could find a foothold, had it by the throat. Savagely the bear shook the gray body, and, as he did so, closed those mighty jaws inexorably. It was over in an instant. The wolf went limp, a gush of crimson stained the tundra, and, dropping the dead weight, Alba swung about to face his sole remaining enemy. But the latter had had enough fighting for one day, and streaking over the ground, running low, topped a distant rise even as Alba looked for him, and disappeared over the crest like a fleeting shadow.

Rumbling heavily, and smarting with pain, the old

bear licked his bleeding flanks hastily for a moment or two, then turned his attention to the hard-won calf. The meat was tender and succulent, a distinct variation from seal and fish, and Alba reveled inordinately in the juicy beef. He ate until he could hold no more, and desisting at last, grasped the remains of the carcass, swung it up, and carried it across to the big rock from behind which he had first watched the scene. Scratching a hole in the soil, he tumbled the body in and covered it loosely. This done, he retraced his steps to the crevice in the rocks near the shoreline, and creeping into it, curled himself away to heavy slumber.

After this piece of unusual good fortune, chance seemed to frown on the white bear's hunting. Without much thought of other prey, he finished the calf a day or two afterward, but his subsequent efforts were singularly unsuccessful. The seals were unreasonably wary, and fishing was very poor, only an occasional salmon rewarding many hours of submarine investigation. He did manage to surprise a goose, about a week after the musk-ox episode, as the bird was feeding in a little slough behind a low ridge of rock, and his rush on the unsuspecting dabbler gave him his first meal in several days. He ate it on the spot, and realized that he was still hungry. Disgruntled and short-tempered, he foraged impatiently throughout the rest of the day, and found nothing.

He slept that night some distance away from his rocky citadel, in an ugly frame of mind, and awoke savage, morose, ready and looking for trouble. After a mile or two of fruitless stalking along the shore, he rounded a jutting headland to find himself on the edge of an icefield several acres in extent, projecting out into the steely waters of the sound. On the edge of the ice, at the water line, he saw something that made him shrink backward and sink to his belly, while his eyes flamed green with excited satisfaction. Lying there, attended by its huge and clumsy mother, was a walrus calf, and sporting on the surface close by were several more of the unwieldy animals, around whom frolicked other youngsters.

Now Alba was, as a rule, very careful about how he conducted himself in regard to walruses. He knew well that these massive animals were no mean fighters, and the bulls had to be reckoned his equals in dogged persistence in dispute. Usually, he left them alone, and was wise in doing so.

On this occasion, however, his hunger overrode his caution. He was quite determined to have that walrus calf and was prepared to go to some considerable trouble and risk to get it. He surveyed the scene deliberately and noted that the bulls were not in evidence, at this time anyway. The cow who was guarding the youngster was not of great size for a walrus, but there was no way of

knowing how long she would remain on the ice, and what had to be done must be done without delay. There was but one procedure open—a stalk across the ice. He crept outward, as flat as he could make himself, and wormed his way by inches across the glistening expanse. His white fur was of course the only thing that made his approach at all possible.

He watched keenly for any movements on the part of the distant animals, and when they raised their heads, he remained absolutely motionless, only to creep forward once more when they looked away. It took him fully half an hour to cover fifty yards, but this brought him within good range of his objective, and he could see their actions much more plainly. Another fifteen minutes passed, and his presence remained undetected. At length he stopped and, gathering his muscles tensely, crouched for a long moment, then launched himself in a silent, irresistible rush, covering the remaining distance like a white thunderbolt.

It was a complete success. Neither the cow nor the calf had the slightest intimation of danger, and as for the latter, it never was aware of any. One smashing blow of Alba's huge paw clove its skull like an egg, and with only a long, quivering relaxation of muscles, its life fled. The sound of the blow, of course, aroused the cow, who turned with extraordinary agility, to see the white monster still atop her offspring. Only for a breath,

however, for no sooner had he struck than Alba leaped away, and waited in a half-crouched, half-rearing posture to see what she would do. Her bulging, ox-like eyes gleamed wickedly as she saw the situation, and a hoarse, choked bellow arose from her throat. Undaunted and deliberate, she hurled herself forward in a lumbering, awkward charge.

Alba dodged aside easily, and making a pass at her with his paw, landed squarely on her neck as she blundered past. His claws raked the cow cruelly, leaving a row of red streaks. But the claws penetrated only slightly below the thick layer of fat, doing no damage. Turning about, she gathered her forces again, and rushed at the bear with determined tenacity, bellowing once more, a clearer, higher note. It was her intention to throw herself on Alba and crush him downward under her vast weight; but he anticipated this and continued his dodging, parrying tactics. He retreated slowly, in the hope of luring the walrus away from the water's edge and the vicinity of the others, who had of course vanished at the first signs of the conflict. So intent was he on this procedure, and on avoiding the repeated rushes, that disaster all but overwhelmed him before he knew it.

Just as he ducked under a headlong attack and swung aside again, a wide, black shadow fell across the ice in front of him. With a startled snarl he veered sharply, and

tried to leap sideways, but his feet slipped at the crucial moment and he fell sprawling, just as a mountainous shape reared high above him and fell forward with a heavy, grunting snort. The bull walrus had taken a hand, and it was touch-and-go for Alba for a second. That very slip, which had seemed fatal, was really his salvation. He failed to complete the spring, but the impetus carried him several feet across the slippery ice, and shot him out from under that descending bulk. Almost, but not quite. His body went clear, but the walrus crashed down upon Alba's hindquarters, and for the time held him immovable.

Bawling with rage and pain, Alba wrenched around and slashed frantically at that huge body above him with furious sweeps of his paws. They landed hard and gouged his antagonist's flanks deeply. With a hoarse bellow, the latter heaved upward and aimed a blow at the bear with his enormous tusks. Had that stroke been true it would have pinned Alba to the ice like a butterfly to a card. It fell short, however, and as soon as the bear felt that dead weight lift, he jerked away and slashed at the cow, who had flopped up to the aid of her lord. The blow knocked her aside, and Alba took a hurried look about him for an avenue of escape, for he was at a heavy disadvantage. There was but one clear way out, and he made for it at once.

The two walruses were between him and the shore,

but the water was at hand, and in a short gallop he reached the ice edge and plunged in. His hindquarters pained him considerably, and it would have been foolhardy to try to continue the conflict. He swam rapidly along the edge of the ice field, gained a position some hundreds of yards below the bellowing monsters behind, and clambered ashore, making off immediately among the tumbled hummocks of the tundra. His mind was far from easy. It is never reassuring, nor conducive to self-respect, to have to retreat; and besides this humiliation, he had gained nothing from the battle. His hunger was sharper than ever, and he had a sore back and lame hind feet in addition to his very empty stomach. True, he had been fortunate in not losing his life, but this did not enter into his furious review of what had happened. It was a most trying and altogether unsatisfactory bit of hunting, and his temper was seething as a result.

It was therefore all the more pleasing for him to find, not far from his rocky retreat, three fine salmon lying on the tundra grass. The mystery of their presence there caused him neither worry nor speculation; he pounced upon them with relish and devoured them completely. Partly mollified by this bit of good fortune, he retired to the crevice, and easing his aching body into the dim interior, sank with a relieved grunt to a long and uninterrupted rest.

He awoke in better humor, but still hungry, and

leaving his hunting grounds along the shore he penetrated inland for some distance. As he was skirting the edge of a large pool, the insistent, high-pitched yapping of a fox sounded shrill upon his ears. At first he gave it but slight heed and continued on his way; but presently he decided to investigate because the noise kept on, coming apparently from a fixed spot. He rounded a rocky buttress and a few feet beyond it saw an unfamiliar, box-like structure built near the shore of a tiny pond. It was from this that the yapping came. Alba stopped short, and holding his head high examined the vicinity with eyes and nose. Nothing stirred. It was a scene of peace and quiet except for that continuous, querulous barking. Unable to discover anything amiss, the bear walked slowly forward, half wondering whether he could surprise this noisy fox and make a meal of him.

The barking ceased suddenly as he walked, and complete stillness reigned. Coming up to the queer-looking contrivance he examined it closely. As he did so he realized that it had been placed there by an agency of which he knew nothing. Suddenly the yapping broke out afresh, seemingly a foot from his nose, and in startled surprise he drew back and eyed the rocks with fresh interest. Thoroughly aroused now, his curiosity overcame his faint misgivings, and he reared upward, putting his paws on the topmost edge of the pile of rocks.

As it was almost square, and about three feet in

height, he could see the top with ease, and found that it was covered with strips of whalebone. Now whalebone he was familiar with—he had fed upon many a carcass thrown ashore, and the tough, elastic substance that depended from the upper jaws he had known for years. Pressing down upon a section of it, he found that it gave easily, and at that moment a sudden commotion sounded from beneath it, a scratching sound and a muffled snarling.

Peering downward he saw, dimly outlined in the small interior, the crouching forms of two foxes, staring up at him in wide-eyed alarm. Here, then, was the source of that stationary barking. With an impatient sweep, he hurled the whalebone roof aside. Finding the interior too deep for further action, he tore at the topmost layer of rocks until he had lowered the wall on one side. The terror-stricken foxes were meanwhile crouching in the furthest corner. Their doom was quick. Reaching inward, he dashed out the life of first one and then the other with successive blows of his paw. Dragging them forth, he squatted beside the trap and satisfied his hunger with the first square meal in several days. Burying what remained on the further side of the little pond, he went on his way immensely satisfied with his morning's foraging.

The finding of the foxes in their queer position did not cause him undue wonder, hardly more in fact than

did the occasional bodies of birds, fish, and lemmings that now appeared frequently on the tundra. He had not yet discovered how they got there, nor did he do so for several days afterward, because he left the vicinity the day following the raid on the fox trap, and wandered far to the westward on an extended hunt. Why he went, he knew not. The wanderlust seized him at times, and he obeyed its call. Nothing important happened during his travels. He found a small, stranded whale on the third day, and, after dispersing the multitude of birds and foxes that were feeding on it, gorged himself on the greasy meat until he could hardly walk. This was followed by a discovery of an extensive nesting colony of blue geese in a quaking tundra bog, and he varied his diet by consuming a number of the large, creamy-white eggs, topped off by a couple of the birds themselves, which he stalked upon the nests.

Wearying at length of his travels, he turned eastward once more, and worked slowly back to his old domain, arriving late one afternoon and proceeding to his rocky home at once, where he remained in a state of lazy satisfaction for several hours. His appetite was at work before very long, however, and he turned inland, with a vague idea in his mind of investigating the fox situation. But before he reached the little pond he forgot the foxes completely in a new and most interesting discovery. Quite in the open, and near the spot where he

had often found dead fish, was another queer structure, certainly placed there only lately. As usual, Alba stopped as soon as he saw it, and examined it from a distance as he had the other, half expecting to hear some sound. None came, however, he took a few steps toward the thing, and stopped again.

Coming up to it at last with strong curiosity, he found that it had little in common with the other except that rocks had been used in both. This one was much larger; it was long, longer than himself, very narrow, and about seven feet high. Rocks were piled on top of it as well as around the sides, and the walls were of huge slabs of ice. It was a most substantial-looking affair. The bear circled it slowly, and coming to the further end saw at once that it was open. A decidedly pleasant smell came from it, the smell of one of his favorite items of food, seal meat. Walking up to this opening, he peered into the dim interior.

At the far end was an indistinct object that he recognized as a piece of this delectable provender, and as he found that he could enter the narrow structure easily enough, though with only a few inches of clearance on each side, he did not hesitate. Padding onward, he gained the end, reached down and seized the meat, and pulled it toward him. Instantly, something happened.

The dim interior became suddenly quite dark and there was a heavy thump behind him. In quick alarm he

backed up rapidly, only to strike heavily against an unseen obstruction. He charged forward with the same result, cracking his head sharply against the rear wall. He stopped, stood stock-still for a moment, then in mingled fear and anger backed again. His hindquarters bumped once more, a grunt came from him, and he sank to the ground wondering and decidedly alarmed. Here was a situation desperate indeed, very confining, and far from reassuring. Knowing nothing at all of traps, he realized nevertheless that he was a captive, that he was quite helpless; and this realization was unpleasant.

Naturally, it reacted on his temper. He became furiously angry, and jumping to his feet made a reckless, headlong rush forward. He might just as well have stayed where he was. Indeed, he took only two or three steps before crashing into the end of the enclosure once more. He drew back, and threw himself from side to side violently, but so little purchase had he that his actions were stopped almost as soon as they were begun, and they started not the slightest tremor in those side walls. In his impotence, his rage flamed into fury. He backed again, was stopped as ignominiously as before, charged forward, and met a like fate. For half an hour, in bawling, tempestuous rage, he surged back and forth in reckless, futile ravings, whose only effect was to make him very tired and give him a sore head and rump. At last he desisted from sheer weariness, and again sank

to his belly, while fear began to replace his anger.

And then, from the outside, near at hand, he heard something—something that made him leap upright and stand in tense, quivering expectancy. It was a sound that he had never heard before, and there was in it a note of mastery, of exultation, that made his shoulder hair prickle queerly, while a rumbling growl sounded deep in his throat. It was the sound of a human voice.

Some several days before, a very unusual thing had happened about five miles east of Alba's rocky citadel. Several dog teams, driven by six men, had appeared from the south. The men had set up a small, compact camp near the shore. This small company was a detachment of scientists on a branch collecting trip from a base expedition on Southampton Island. They had penetrated into Alba's domain to take certain birds and animals along the edges of the tundra lakes, and were accompanied by three Eskimo guides and the captain of the expedition's ship.

As it happened, Alba had been hunting to the westward when they arrived and during the first few days of their stay, but signs of his occupancy of the region were read by the Eskimos, who told their white employers. One of the scientists, an eager, alert young man, was considerably elated at the news, especially because they were looking for this very thing and had been com-

missioned to procure, if possible, a live polar bear for the zoölogical garden of the big city whence they had come. As he was in charge of the mammal-collecting, he was fired with the idea of trapping the bear, and despite the apparently unsurmountable difficulties as outlined by the natives he determined to make the attempt.

He was heartily backed in this resolve by the captain. The latter was an enthusiastic sportsman and hard worker, but he had a violent temper and a vindictive spirit. Unlike most men of short temper who are quick to take offense and quick to forget, he never seemed to forgive an injury whether real or imagined.

The young scientist, Emerson, pumped the natives about methods of trapping, but they had little to say, for none of them had ever tried—or dreamed of trying—to take a great white bear of the north alive. Indeed they were strongly averse to the enterprise, for they suspected only too clearly what it entailed. But their discouraging attitude did not damp Emerson's enthusiasm. He discussed the problem with Captain Talbot at length, but they could not hit on any definite plan. Steel traps were to be avoided except as a last resort—Emerson wanted the bear uninjured. While he was racking his brains for a solution of the problem, he paved a possible way by distributing at certain points on the tundra various offerings of fish, ducks and other choice titbits,

in the hope that the bear would find them and thus be made easier to capture when the right idea presented itself.

In this he was signally successful. Alba, in his wanderings, came across the baits, and devoured them readily. That he did not discover the camp was due to the fact that he shortly turned westward again and was absent for some days, and thus—as the camp was well east of his regular beat, he remained in ignorance of it. The situation was unchanged for a week or more, when at last, in a discussion with the Eskimos about a possible substitute for the fox snares that Alba had despoiled, Emerson hit upon a plan. He had been disappointed to find the fox trap rifled, for he wanted some of those animals alive also, but it occurred to him that a very strong enlargement of that type of trap might prove successful in taking the bear.

Accordingly, he outlined the plan to the others and enlisted their aid. Captain Talbot was emphatic in his opinion that it was the very thing. Taking the natives, they repaired on the following day to a spot about two miles from the camp, where Emerson had left fish on former occasions, and set about erecting a rude but substantial structure. It was really just an enlargement of the typical Eskimo wolf trap, built of slabs of ice, but of treble its strength and durability. Using heavy pieces, and bracing them firmly with numerous rocks, they built

a long, narrow pen, raising the sides to a height of about seven feet, and covering it with stout pieces of drift-wood, weighted down with more rocks.

At the rear, a hole was made in the closely fitting end slab, and inside the trap a ring of wire was attached to a stout line running through the hole and leading back over the roof of the structure to the sliding door at the front. This door was constructed of another heavy slab running smoothly in grooves on each side, and working easily. A strong peg, pointing inward, was driven into the ground at the inside of the trap just below the hole in the slab through which the cord ran. A bait was to be attached to the wire ring, and the latter pulled downward and looped over the peg. The door was then raised, and the other end of the cord was attached to it and drawn taut. The slightest tug at the bait would loosen the ring from the peg, whereupon the door, freed of support, would fall instantly downward.

The device was thoroughly tested, the Captain himself insisting on entering the trap and pulling at the ring, evincing intense satisfaction at the falling of the door. Naturally, much of the efficacy of the trap lay in the fact that the movements of its victim would be so contricted that little damage could result from the animal's contortions. The construction of the trap consumed the day, what with testing and checking the details and ar-

ranging the bait. They then left the rest to chance, and returned to camp with fervent hopes.

They talked of little else during the next day, but on visiting the spot in the afternoon they found everything just as they had left it, for Alba, unknown to them, was still away on his wanderings. Somewhat disappointed, but not discouraged, they wished for better luck and again took their departure. The next day they had other things to do, but early on the third morning Emerson and Talbot set off for the trap.

No sooner had they reached a position from which they could see clearly than they noted, even from a distance, that the door was down. With shouts of joy they rushed toward it, and, ascertaining by cautious investigation that the bear was really inside, they rejoiced audibly and enthusiastically. Their voices, coming clearly to the imprisoned Alba, alarmed him thoroughly and roused that disturbing fear of the unknown which is always demoralizing.

Now that their plan had succeeded and the bear was at their disposal, Emerson set about the harder and more complicated task of taking him from the trap and preparing him for transportation. With his usual foresight he had worked out a tentative plan, and this he began at once. He despatched the willing Talbot to the camp for the others, giving him certain other instructions also.

He waited impatiently for some time. Though he had faith in the strength of the trap, he was not sure how long it would resist the violent lunges of the captive. At last, however, he saw the others approaching, and welcomed them fervently. They had brought one sled and all the stout rope the camp afforded; fortunately, there was plenty.

Having outlined his plans to the others, he set to work. He cut several lengths of line and made running nooses in three of them. Then, climbing to the roof of the trap, he cautiously uncovered a section near the rear wall.

This called for considerable nerve and careful work, but it was the only thing he could think of. He succeeded better than he had hoped. As the hole in the roof opened, Alba, in a furious lunge, reared upward, his paws against the rear wall, and shoved his nose through the aperture, dropping back almost at once because of his cramped position. Carefully, the man on top removed another section, ready and expectant. Up came that narrow head once more, fully exposed now. As quick as thought, Emerson snaked the noose about it and drew it taut.

A snarling bawl came from the bear and he dropped like a flash. Holding the rope tight, Emerson descended to the ground and went to the rear of the trap, straining heavily at the line with the assistance of another of his workers. He then directed Talbot to raise the door care-

fully and ascertain the bear's position. It was found that he was stretched at full length, unable to reach the noose with his paws, and having his head close to the rear wall. Talbot now took another noose, and with considerable difficulty—and a narrow escape from being slashed by Alba's claws—managed to lasso the hind legs of the frantic animal. Only the narrowness of the trap kept the bear from making this impossible. Its restricted confines also hampered the Captain's movements.

Slackening his rope a little, Emerson allowed the others to drag the bear toward the door, and as the hind feet appeared he again tightened the line. That choking grip about his throat rather took the fight out of Alba for a moment, and more rope was thrown about the hinder part of his body until he was rendered quite helpless as far as hind legs were concerned. The noosing and tying up of his fore feet was not, however, accomplished without great trouble and fighting on the part of the whole party. Emerson all but choked the bear in his excitement and anxious efforts to aid the rest, but it was really this that made the job possible.

At last, trussed like a fowl, impotent and snarling, Alba lay outside the trap before his captors, who mopped perspiring brows and gazed at each other and the bear with mingled weariness and triumph. Another struggle ensued when they put Alba on the sled, and indeed, he could not altogether get on it, though his resistance was

feeble because of his bonds. It was his size that was to blame. The management of the dogs was no small item, but in this the Eskimos came to the front nobly, and achieved victory in the end. It was late when they finally reached the camp, and all hands were thoroughly exhausted.

A long rest refreshed them mightily and, though their work in this locality was not quite complete, Emerson decided to return at once to the base and get his captive into less restricted quarters. He despatched one of the Eskimos ahead with a note, asking that a substantial cage be prepared for the valuable acquisition to their collections, and the native was soon out of sight on his mission. Breaking camp, the rest followed as soon as possible, but their progress was slow and tedious. Though the distance was not great, they worked hard for every foot they covered, and nearly repented of their fortune in securing the bear, though, with so many difficulties already overcome, Emerson was the more determined to see the affair through.

It was on the second day of the return journey that the incident occurred that all but set their heart-breaking labors at naught. It was started through a kindly intention on the part of Captain Talbot; it ended with his sudden change of mind into furious hatred, and his rash attempt to end the life of the valuable object of their toil. At the noon-day rest he offered Alba a fish, and—

too careless in his movements—he bent over and extended his offering. As quickly as a striking snake, that narrow head leaped upward. It did not get very far, for the rope arrested the movement almost as soon as it was begun; but it got far enough for those keen teeth to reach the unwary Captain's hand, and they slashed it to the bone.

The man jumped backward with a startled outcry, his foot slipped and he fell, striking his head sharply upon the hard ground. With a furious imprecation, he leaped to his feet at once, crimson with anger and mortification, and, jerking out his pistol, leveled it at the bear. Emerson leaped forward with a shout and struck up the Captain's arm as the gun exploded, and the bullet whined harmlessly wide of the helpless animal. The man's rage was terrible. He fought to send a second shot, but the others, coming to Emerson's aid, held him until he regained some degree of control. After taking his gun away and talking some sense into him, they released him and dressed the bleeding wound. From that time onward, Talbot eyed the bear with a vindictive hatred that never lessened, and only because of his sworn word not to carry his feelings to a drastic end did Emerson ever leave the animal unwatched. Talbot, in his blackest humors, would kick Alba savagely until he was sternly warned by the rest that such conduct would not be tolerated.

This state of tense antagonism was not lost on Alba. The bear was quick to realize the man's enmity, and his snarling growls and blazing eyes when Talbot was near gave proof of his reciprocal feeling. It was with intense relief that Emerson saw, on the third day, a party from the base camp approaching to help in bringing in the captive. They were extravagant in their admiration of him, and congratulated the captors heartily. The task of the latter was now eased considerably by the increased number of men and dogs on this last stage of the journey.

At the base at last, their troubles seemed over. The ship's carpenter had done his work well, and with adequate tools and materials had prepared a stout, roomy cage, a most welcome sight to the men who had borne the onus of caring for the roped animal. It was hardly less welcome to Alba himself when he was put into it and his ropes were loosened and removed. He delivered a furious assault on the bars when his bonds dropped away, but quickly realized that he was still a captive, though much more comfortable than he had been at any time since the door of the trap fell behind him. He was greatly irritated, during the days that followed, by the admiring groups of sailors and other members of the expedition who found time to gather in front of the cage, and his bursts of rage at being stared at instilled a deeper respect in the watchers.

To Emerson's great relief and satisfaction, the bear ate freely—only while alone, but none the less regularly. He was plentifully supplied, and his captivity did not seem to affect anything but his temper. Only Talbot regarded him with hostility; the Captain's angry eyes often rested on the animal with a longing that was easily understood by any who happened to see him looking at the occupant of the cage. It really seemed as though Fate were bent upon increasing the animosity between the bear and the Captain. Late one afternoon, a startled, high-pitched yelp came from near the cage, and a quick investigation revealed a tragedy. Those who ran to the spot found the Captain's little fox terrier, a playful favorite of his, lying in a pool of blood a few inches from the bars.

The little animal, sniffing about the cage, had ventured too near the motionless bear, who, with his head close to the bars, saw the dog as it rounded the corner of the enclosure almost in his face; and from that still white form had flashed a mighty paw, which, leaping between the bars, had fallen full upon the terrier and crushed it to the deck. One yelp he gave, and that was all.

Alba, jumping to his feet as men came running, drew back into a corner and snarled his defiance and warning to the group in front of him. This added insult to the Captain all but rendered him unmanageable once more. He cursed the bear with fervent, fluent profanity while

the listening sailors found cause for thanks that none of them were under like condemnation. But Emerson's word was law over the collections, and only this prevented Talbot from another murderous attack on the white captive.

Two weeks passed, and preparations were made for leaving the north. Early one morning they weighed anchor and moved slowly away from the island, with all specimens packed, notes arranged, and everything secure. Alba's cage was placed on the forehatch, braced with ropes and timbers against the motion of the ship. Bewildered by the bustle attendant upon the departure, he spent most of the time crowded into one corner. As quiet regained sway, and the usual work and watch of a ship at sea went on, he would stand erect near the bars, and either stare with head held high, out over the heaving waters, or swing his body from side to side with monotonous regularity as his head brushed against the bars. His apparent resignation and inscrutably brooding eyes affected Emerson strangely. The man would sit for a long while before the cage, watching that swaying form, and several times the bear's eyes would meet his in a half-questioning, haunting gaze. On one occasion, after such a look, he spoke aloud to his white captive in a singularly regretful tone.

"I guess I've done you a scurvy trick, old man," he said slowly. "You're as much a part of this country as

the ice and the Borealis, and I'm taking you away from it forever. Somehow, I don't get the kick out of it that I thought I would."

The bear hesitated in his swaying as the man's voice reached him, and again Emerson thought he saw a mute appeal in that brooding gaze. Rising quickly, he walked away. Talbot, however, entertained no such feelings. He made no secret of the fact that nothing would give him more satisfaction than to do away with their white passenger, and he never passed the cage without a revengeful glare at the silent, swinging figure within.

The ship plowed on across the Bay, turned eastward through Hudson Strait, and pointed her bow southward along the rugged coast of Labrador. Some one or two hundred miles below the jutting Cape Chidley, they entered a dense fog belt one night. The engines were slowed down, and amid the swirling, dripping wreaths of grayish vapor they groped their way. The sea was fairly open, little ice having been seen of late, but toward morning a cold norther roared down from the murky gloom astern, and chilled the watch on deck with its icy breath. It served, however, to clear away the fog, and in the growing light, the Captain rang the engine-room telegraph to half-speed. Dimly seen blotches of white, passing ghost-like upon the heaving waters, proclaimed the presence of ice floes, and a keen look-out was kept.

Perhaps the bow look-out was numbed and drowsy

from his long exposure, perhaps the vague half light was deceptive as to distance, perhaps the dancing white-caps merged too completely with the low-lying outline of the floe. For some such reason, and without any warning, a violent shuddering concussion vibrated suddenly throughout the ship. There was a sound of rending metal and splintering wood, a long, grating wrench, and with a sickening lurch the vessel heeled drunkenly to starboard, listing heavily. The blow had thrown everything movable into a heap. Men pitched from their bunks, crockery leaped from shelves and tables, and jangling bells, shouted commands, and blast of escaping steam mingled in wild confusion.

With admirable coolness, Captain Talbot restored discipline with iron hand and dominating will. A hurried investigation proved that the situation was desperate indeed. The bows were completely crushed in. The steamer had struck a huge mass of low-floating ice, and only the closing of the compartment doors was keeping it above the surface. It was plain that she was doomed, and the boats were ordered out. As if to atone in some slight measure for the disaster, the murk lifted as the boats were being prepared, and on the starboard hand appeared a rock-bound coast. Even without glasses the men could see a group of rude huts nestling under the rugged rim, and the sight cheered the laboring men as they pulled and hauled at the ropes.

The scientists, in desperation, were striving to save what they could of their notes and records, for nothing bulky could be taken in the boats. An ominous cracking, a gurgling rush of collapsing bulkheads below decks, urged them to greater haste. Captain Talbot, pausing in his supervision of the work about the boats, ran forward for a moment, and, as he passed the cage on the forehatch, halted suddenly. The bear, sensing that something was amiss, stood rigidly unmoving, gazing with wide eyes at the scurrying forms that passed and repassed his cage. He turned his stare upon the Captain; and a snarl curled his lips, and red gleams shone from his now narrowed eyes. The man stepped close, and shook a clenched fist at the imprisoned animal.

"At last!" he muttered. "Blast you, my time has come, and I settle with you here and now!" He drew his pistol, gazed down the short barrel, then lowered it as another idea leaped into his mind. He grinned evilly in savage satisfaction. "Shooting's too good for you, you white devil!" he cried. "I'll let the sea do for you, as it has for us. You can drown like a rat in a trap, and be damned to you!"

Turning on his heel, he walked rapidly away, shouting an order. "Boats away!" he cried. "Lively, everybody, abandon ship!"

Emerson, appearing on deck with his arms loaded with books and small boxes, stopped with a short ejaculation

as his eye fell upon the cage. In the excitement, he had totally forgotten the bear. Running to the cage, he glanced hurriedly at the still figure standing there, and in the animal's eyes there was that mute appeal once more. Darting to the nearest boat, he threw his load into it, and returned to the cage. Muttering excitedly, he looked about with wild impatience as the deck trembled under foot. As he looked, he caught sight of an axe, standing in its sockets on the foremast. Leaping toward it, he snatched the keen tool from its fastenings and, whirling it above his head, crashed it into the stout, wooden side of Alba's cage.

Again and again he struck, savagely, hurriedly as warning yells came from other parts of the sinking ship. At last, with a splintering, tearing sound, he saw the partition totter. He dropped the axe and, running to the side, leaped out upon the boat falls, and went down the ropes to the already floating craft. As the other boats were pulling away, the Captain appeared on the deck above, stuffing the ship's papers into his pocket, and in a flying leap made the nearmost boat.

The vessel lurched again, in a sickening, drunken, wallowing motion; her port side rose into the air and settled backward as the bows dipped below the waters. A sudden yell broke out from one of the boats, and an excited seaman, standing erect, pointed with outstretched, quivering arm. There, upon the rail, huge,

white and massive, appeared a royal form that raised a narrow, wedge-shaped head to stare outward for a moment over the tumbling waters. Then, in a clean, arching dive, it left the sinking vessel, to disappear beneath the sea. A cheer, spontaneous and involuntary, broke from the watching men as that white head appeared once more, while with steady, powerful strokes Alba headed toward the distant shoreline.

As the boats followed in his wake, two pairs of eyes watched that receding head with fixed, unwavering intensity. In one gleamed defeated, disappointed chagrin; in the other glowed a light of sympathetic understanding and kindly gladness, while around the corners of the mouth below them appeared a fleeting smile.

THE END

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